THE DETERMINANTS OF VOTER TURNOUT IN ENGLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

by

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Chapter 6: Explaining turnout variation in London wards.

Chapter 7: Explaining turnout variation in metropolitan wards.

Chapter 8: Explaining turnout variation in district wards.

Chapter 9: Local election turnout - a qualitative explanation.

Chapter 10: Conclusions.

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Chapter 1: Local election turnout - an introduction.

1.1: Introduction.

The level of local election turnout has important political and democratic implications. It is politically important because the electoral process ensures that local councillors are held directly accountable to the people. The level of voter turnout and how these votes are apportioned will determine the electoral outcome. Voter turnout also plays a significant role in our evaluation of local democracy. When voter participation is high then local democracy is perceived as being healthy, while low turnout is regarded as a sign of the public's lack of interest in the local democratic process.

Given this background, therefore, it is surprising to discover that so little serious attention has been given to the subject. There is a wealth of literature written on turnout at the national level across the world, but the rate of voter participation in local elections has been relatively ignored. When local election turnout is addressed by politicians, academics and journalists alike, discussion invariably focuses upon a single issue - the low rates of participation that can be found. Indeed, local election turnout is considerably lower than that for parliamentary elections, on average approximately 40% compared with 70-75%, but the level of debate about low turnout in local elections is far from sophisticated. It is accepted as fact, for example, that local election turnout is 40% and that few local authorities deviate significantly from this figure. It is also assumed that little variation in turnout exists within the various wards comprising a local authority. Little is understood about how factors including the size of electoral units, the nature and level of party competition and the socio-economic composition of local authorities and wards can affect turnout. External factors can also play a part in raising or depressing local turnout. The general nature of the national political climate when local elections take place, will have a direct bearing upon the electorate's interest in the battle for council seats. Sometimes the political atmosphere is charged and the level of turnout will reflect this

situation, just as a general air of political disinterest will contribute to lower turnout. What is important, however, is that we increase our level of knowledge about the determinants of local election turnout. Only then will we have a well-informed discussion about the level of turnout and its significance for our system of local democracy.

This research is designed to examine the variation in turnout that occurs in local elections. It will identify the determinants of turnout at the local authority level and compare the results across London, the metropolitan boroughs and the English shire districts since the reorganisation of the local government system took place in the early 1970s. The variation in turnout levels will be examined by using a number of independent variables. Those local authorities which have levels of turnout that deviate significantly from the mean will be analysed in more detail. This pattern of analysis will be repeated at the ward level for the three types of local authority identified above. This dependence on aggregate data analysis will then be augmented with the analysis of data obtained from a survey and in-depth interviews. The responses to the survey and the findings from the interviews will be a valuable addition to our electoral data. This research is the first investigation that has exclusively focused on this significant topic, and analysed data covering such a large number of local authorities over a period of more than 20 years.

1.2: Why study voter turnout in local elections?

This section heading can be viewed as being three questions in one: Why study voter turnout, why study local elections and why study voter turnout in local elections? These questions will now be addressed in turn. Firstly, why should we study the topic of voter turnout? Voting constitutes a form of minimal participation that is widely available and easy to exercise. Although citizens may realise that singularly their vote may not be important in determining the outcome of the election, the time and trouble it takes to perform a somewhat passive activity is deemed by the majority of people, in general elections at least, to be worthwhile, despite its strict irrationality. The vote is regarded as

the pinnacle of participation, to give a citizen a vote is to enfranchise him or her. Although the vote may be seen as having merely a symbolic role, its importance lies not just in the fact that it enables the voters to identify with society, but also has the more important potential to cause political change. Moreover, the formal participation of citizens in the political process, as signified by voting, is an important symbol of legitimacy in a modern society.

Turnout is a vital area of study for political scientists, not least because it poses important questions about accountability, democracy and effectiveness. Crewe (1981) writes that within this topic, there are three major points that are worthy of special attention. Firstly, there are historical reasons why voter turnout is important. After the conflicts involving the issue of whether women should get the vote, or to extending the franchise to blacks in the United States of America and South Africa, the vote has not only intrinsic importance, but it has also become the ultimate symbol of citizenship. Voter turnout, therefore, has become directly associated with the well-being of a democratic society. Crewe suggests that the second factor is provided by democratic theory. The study of voter participation allows us to see whether the two strands that signify a democracy, universality and equality, are still intact. Every individual of voting age, whatever their social or economic circumstances, should have an equal say. How certain social groupings respond to the opportunity to exercise the franchise will have a bearing on society. The third point made by Crewe is that because the level of turnout is a critical indication of the involvement of citizens in the political life of a society, it offers an important comparative measure for evaluating citizen participation.

Turnout is an attribute of an individual electoral area. The mistake is often made of assuming the average rate of turnout is constant and consistent across the country, as if one figure is characteristic of the whole system. One can not look at an average turnout of a place and infer anything meaningful for the whole country, or even another place, because there are so many intervening factors. This causes a problem because there is so much

variation in the level of turnout in local elections across the country that has up to now been largely ignored. There are many questions that are presently unanswered. Why, for example, is turnout lower in local elections than in general elections and is the margin of difference significant? What appear to be the determinants of turnout in local elections, and are the same factors at work in general elections? Why is there so much variation in the level of turnout between local authorities, within local authorities and over time? What is so special about certain places that their level of turnout is especially high or low, and can these influential factors be replicated for other areas? We will attempt to answer questions such as these and many others in this thesis. Studies have attempted to discover why turnout varies, but as Brody (1978) concluded from his research, turnout remains a 'puzzle' - while levels of education were increasing and the rules of electoral registration were becoming more relaxed, the proportion of people voting was still falling.

In answer to our second underlying question from the section heading, why study local elections, we can argue that local elections are a vital part of the democratic system, providing an invaluable opportunity for citizens to participate in their local communities, in contrast to the more distant national elections. Local elections can be an important means for cultivating a sense of a democracy that is legitimate, responsible and accountable. Previous research has pointed out, however, that the electorate's interest in, and knowledge of local government, indicates that local politics is neither very highly regarded nor fully understood (Miller, 1988). This situation may simply be the result of the public's ignorance of the functions that local authorities administer. Potentially, this could have far-reaching implications for as Kingdom argues,

> 'Local democracy is not something distinct from the democratic life of the nation -it is part of the wider system, as a limb is part of the body. If the local arm of the democratic state is amputated, the whole body politic is incapacitated' (1991:6).

Perhaps, if the electorate realised the important role that local government plays in the day-to-day running of every community across this country, then voter participation in local elections would increase.

Local government receives little attention from political commentators and the mass media, unless it can be used to make judgements about the wider political system. During the 1980s for example, there was considerable media attention, particularly in the tabloid newspapers, given to the activities of what were dubbed 'loony-left' councils. Such negative coverage of local government would doubtless leave readers with a very poor regard of local politics that, in turn, might affect an elector's inclination to vote in local elections. Local election results are frequently seen as the basis for speculating about the result of the next general election. Media reporting of local elections often concentrates on the uniformity of national trends, disregarding the wide political variations that occur both between and within local authorities. Little thought is given to the wider implications of the results for the administration of local services. Against this background, there is a great need for some analysis of local elections to offset the pre-occupation with the national political scene.

Why should we be concerned specifically with the level of turnout in local elections? In answer to our third underlying question, it can be argued that local elections are a useful forum for the study of voter participation because of their sheer frequency relative to national elections. Moreover, because local authority wards are very much smaller than parliamentary constituencies, the analysis of turnout can operate at a much lower level of aggregation than is the case in general elections. Despite these advantages, there has been only a limited amount of research conducted on local election turnout. As Stanyer writes,

> 'There have been numerous attempts to account for the observed variations in the percentage voting in local elections, but most studies have dealt with only limited aspects, or a few local authorities, and the findings don't add up to a consistent picture of the forces producing the easily observable differences between local political systems. Few if any of the studies have even considered the question whether these variations have any consequences within the miniature system itself' (1976:272).

One clear reason for this lack of research into local election turnout is due to the lack of available data. In the past, the collection of local electoral data in this country was sporadic, and unlike other western democracies no official publication of local electoral

results existed. Only recently has a comprehensive set of results become available to the research community. In 1991, the Economic and Social Research Council commissioned Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher to assemble these data in machine-readable form for England and Wales, and a couple of years later David Denver performed a similar service for contests in Scotland. These results have been deposited in the data archive at the University of Essex. Before these data were compiled, the study of local election turnout beyond a few case-studies would have been impossible.

1.3: Does the level of local election turnout really matter?

Miller writes that, 'the most obvious feature of local election voting in Britain is the low level of turnout' (1986a:111), but what do we mean by 'low'? Certainly, the turnout rate is low compared to the level seen at general elections, with the exceptions of 1979 and 1997, when both local and parliamentary elections were held simultaneously. When the turnout in local elections is compared with the level of participation in other forms of elections such as trade union ballots and school opt-outs, however, it is relatively high. Undy and Martin confirm this point by noting that, 'in the highly competitive Equity elections of 1982, only 13% participated' (1984:82). Understandably, as local government forms a vital part of the structure of politics in this country, there is great controversy over the level of turnout in these elections. Participation is generally seen to be a good thing, but there is a lack of unanimity over the level of turnout deemed 'acceptable'.

One school of thought maintains that low polls are not an issue for great concern. Sharpe observes that,

> 'Participation has no special relationship to democracy. The non-participation or apathy of the electorate was an important attribute of Western democracy: the right to be apathetic was both a reflection of the avoidance of ideological conflict and of the freedom from constraint enjoyed by the individual in liberal democracies' (1976:115).

Democracy does not require mass participation, only the structure to enable the electorate to involve themselves if they wish to do so. Continuing this line of reasoning, it could be argued that the current rate of local election turnout may be seen as a desirable level of involvement, since high participation, both in voting and active interest in politics, may be dangerous and could threaten the stability of the democratic state. In another context, Lane has argued that, 'the enormous election figures in Austria 1923-30, and in Germany 1930-33, were symptoms of a political tension heightened in the extreme, and foreshadowed the fall of these democratic regimes' (1959:346). Similarly, Morris Jones (1954) and Milbrath and Goel (1977) argue that a very high turnout may be a symptom of crisis and cleavage, though not necessarily the cause. In September 1993, the far-right British National Party (BNP) won a by-election in Millwall, located in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. Against a background of racial tension in the area (there were accusations of racism levelled at some members of the ruling Liberal Democrat administration, which resulted in the national party expelling some local councillors), the following year's May elections were very keenly fought. While the level of turnout across London fell by 2 percentage points, that in Tower Hamlets rose by 11 percentage points. Such evidence could be used to support the view that high voter participation is not necessarily a sign of a vibrant democracy.

That low turnout is not a very important indicator of the health of a democratic system, can be viewed as dependent upon a particular interpretation of Gregory's 'rule of anticipated reactions' (1969). Put simply, this makes the reasonable assumption that once councillors are elected, they usually want to continue in this post. Such councillors should, therefore, be responsive to public reaction to a council policy or decision. Failure to be sensitive to public opinion might result in those councillors losing their seats. Gregory maintained that,

> 'One advantage of this approach for those who seek to defend local government is that it reduces the significance of low turn-out. Politicians will realise that they may just as easily lose office on a 40 per cent poll, as on one of 80 per cent' (1969:33).

On the other side of the equation, however, the level of local election turnout is significant because it indicates that the elections are viewed as important. It is popularly argued that low polls are caused by a general sense of political alienation and that local elections are also seen as 'low stimulus' elections, or 'second-order' elections. These are elections where the individual voter does not see their vote as being very important. Undoubtedly, in important elections it is reasonable to expect more people to be motivated to go out and vote compared with unimportant elections, but how do we define 'important'? Most people appear to agree that general elections are more important than local elections, hence the higher rate of voter participation. This does not mean that the level of turnout in local elections is irrelevant. Perhaps, a lack of interest and apathy is shown towards local elections because as Byrne argues,

> '...people see local authorities as essentially administrative rather than decision-making bodies, so that it little matters to electors who sits on the council ...(as) the administrative end-product will be the same' (1994:138).

Low turnout, of course, affects the elected representative's ability to speak on behalf of the local community. Chandler believes that, 'low levels of participation are not an encouraging sign of health, and will clearly foster the tendency towards control of local government by small isolated party elites' (1991:219). It may even be argued that local democracy can be undermined by the electors refusing to make use of their democratic right to vote. The Maud Committee, which investigated local government during the 1960s concluded,

> 'We have found no evidence to support the common belief that our local government has some uniquely democratic content. Whether the test is public interest, as exemplified by the percentage poll at elections or the extent to which members of the public individually and in their associations are drawn into the process, our local government does not appear to be especially democratic' (cited in Gregory, 1969:32).

A certain level of voter participation, therefore, is needed before an electoral system can be regarded as 'democratic'. While there is no prescribed level of participation, most political

commentators believe that the level of turnout in local elections is at a dangerous level and falls well short of the ideal.

We are inclined to support the view that sees local elections as a vital part of the democratic system, and high levels of voter participation are to be encouraged on this account. Lane writes that underlying this view of having been given the right to participate we should take advantage of the opportunity, is, 'some belief in the natural harmony of nature and society such that when each seeks to achieve his ends in politics, the good of all is somehow achieved' (1959:337). That still leaves the difficult task of finding evidence about the reasons why people do not vote. That is the first step towards countering apathy and raising the general level of voter participation at the local level.

We have introduced the subject matter of this thesis and our reasoning for why such a study should be conducted. The next stage of this introductory chapter is to discuss the different levels of data we have at our disposal, and describe our approach to the analysis of the variation in local election turnout. We will explain the advantages and disadvantages of using the different levels of data, and will outline the structure of the thesis, chapter by chapter, according to the type of data we are going to use.

1.4: Local authority level analysis.

Data are available for analysis at both the local authority and the ward level in the London boroughs, the metropolitan boroughs and the English shire districts. The authority level data have a number of distinct advantages that make it a good area to start the analysis in Chapter 4. This level of data is after all where political control and 'power' lies. It is where debates are held which produce the decisions that affect the electorate of the contested area. While a survey can only provide us with a snap-shot of the electorate at a fixed point in time, the data-base we utilise for this thesis covers more than a 20 year

period. This means that we can measure change in the political and structural variables over time and use socio-economic data from two censuses.

The investigation of the turnout figures at the local authority level in Chapter 4, enables us to detect patterns of voter participation over time. We can observe, for example, if turnout was especially high in some election years in London and whether this phenomenon also exists in the metropolitan boroughs and in the districts as well. If we find that turnout is high in a particular election, then we need an explanation for that occurrence.

Two other important uses of data at this level are, firstly, the opportunity to see how the average turnout rates of local authorities compare to one another. Is there a pattern to the level of turnout when figures from these local authorities are compared? Is the turnout in some councils always very high or low in relation to other councils and is this situation the same in all types of local government? These questions among others will be addressed in Chapter 4. A second approach is to examine the turnout in individual local authorities over all the elections. Does the participation rate in a local authority remain at a consistent level over time? Does a local authority ever have a one-off high or low level of turnout, when other local authorities remain at the same level? If the answer is yes, are there any reasons that can be suggested to explain the peaks and troughs of this council's turnout performance? Local authority level data will provide us with answers to these questions. The results of this early analysis in Chapter 4 will help us to build up a picture of turnout at the local authority level and will provide a foundation for further analysis at the ward level.

The analysis in Chapter 5 continues with the use of local authority level data. All the political, structural and socio-economic differences that exist between local authorities, will all help to influence the level of turnout in a local election. Hence, we need to try and uncover as many of these differences as possible, so we are able to explain the variation in turnout at the local authority level. The more determinants that can be found to be

relevant, the more likely it is that the variation in our dependent variable can be fully explained.

Chapter 5 will test a number of hypotheses using the three different types of independent variables, political, structural and socio-economic. Correlations will then be conducted to examine the direction and strength of the relationships between the range of variables and turnout. The final part of the chapter will consist of a multivariate analysis (multiple regression) using all the independent variables. This analysis will enable us to determine how much of the variation in turnout can be explained by the variables in our regression equations. There will always be turnout rates that are significantly higher or lower than that expected by the regression. If we can imagine all the observed and expected turnout figures plotted on a graph and a regression line running through them, the points that are above or below this line of 'best fit' are called the residuals. Chapter 5 will examine those local authorities, the residuals, that consistently produce turnout rates not predicted by the regression equation. This will form a very useful part of the thesis, but it will only be at the ward level where we can delve into the residual analysis in greater detail, that the explanation of turnout variation and 'deviant' levels of turnout will be complete.

1.5: Ward level analysis.

Local authority level data provides us with a wealth of useful information, especially as these data have been collected over a period of more than 20 years. There are a number of reasons, however, why the local authority level is probably not the best place for explaining the variation in local election turnout. The figures at the local authority level are averages of a number of wards that make up a local authority. What is true of a local authority, is not necessarily true of all the wards that comprise it. For example, a council may have the lowest turnout of their type of local authority, but this average figure could hide a ward that produces an above average, or even a very high turnout. Average figures

disguise real ward level differences, both political and social, that can exist within a local authority.

Another problem with the analysis of turnout at the local authority level, is that it is difficult to unravel the influence of a number of variables in the data-set. For example, we may find significant relationships between variables such as marginality and political control and the level of turnout. The electorate may not have the knowledge regarding the marginality and the political control of their local authority, so the results we find may not be present in the mind of voters when they enter the polling station. If marginality and political control are important to the elector in deciding whether to vote, it is likely that they will be influential at the ward level, where their individual vote will help to determine the outcome of the political contest in a ward.

Ward level data are especially useful because of the large number of cases that are involved. These elections offer the greatest number of observations of any electoral data-set in this country. The turnout figures at the ward level are 'real', they are not averaged and are at a very low level of aggregation, the lowest for which voting data are available. This enables us to see what is actually happening 'on the ground'. The political, structural and socio-economic make-up of individual wards can be analysed, so we can see how their composition will affect the level of turnout. Within a ward there will be polling districts with slightly different compositions, but the analysis of the variation in turnout according to polling districts within local government wards lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

This thesis contains three chapters (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) that study the variation in turnout at the ward level. The structure for each of the three chapters is the same and will consist of three broad sections. We shall begin by analysing the variation in ward turnout within each of our three types of local authority, namely the London boroughs, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts. We will examine the historical background to the turnout rates, the high turnout wards, the low turnout wards and the variation of ward turnout

within local authorities. The analysis in this section acts as an introduction to each chapter. This is the first time that turnout at the ward level has been studied so extensively.

The second part of each ward level chapter will test a number of hypotheses using political and structural variables. What effect does the nature and level of party competition, the closeness of the ward contest at the previous election and the size of ward electorates have on turnout? Correlations will then be conducted between the political, structural and socio-economic variables and the level of turnout to test some potential relationships and compare the results to those found in our earlier analysis of local authority level data.

The third section of each ward level chapter employs multiple regression in an effort to explain the variation in turnout using the three different types of independent variables. We will analyse how much of the variation in turnout can be explained by combinations of these variables and whether the results vary greatly between wards in London, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts. The wards that do not fit into the regression equation, the residuals, will be examined next. For each type of local authority, we shall study how many outlier wards there are, which boroughs or districts they come from and the year of the election. We will also scrutinise the highest and lowest residuals in each election and the wards that appear as residuals a number of times. In order to examine these 'worst fit' wards, qualitative research techniques will be used to attempt to explain why these wards are 'deviant'.

Of course, both the local authority and the ward level should be studied in tandem, because these data-sets combine to produce information at both the macro and the micro level. The figures at the ward level help to remedy most of the problems that we have at the local authority level. Special consideration should be placed on the lower level of aggregation, because there has been little previous research on this area, especially in local elections. It

is hoped that both sets of data can help to explain why turnout varies in local government elections.

1.6: Quantitative data analysis.

We have outlined the different levels of data that appear in the data-base and explained why the analysis of both the local authority and the ward level is needed to fully explain the variation in local election turnout. The next section discusses how we are going to analyse the quantitative data. There are two stages to our study. The first stage is to test a number of independent variables individually, to see if they have any effect on the dependent variable, turnout. The second stage of our study is to use multivariate analysis to analyse the data.

Each variable studied will be split into a number of categories and the level of turnout will be examined according to each grouping. The categories have been defined in such a way that we are able to test our hypotheses. For example, we can confirm whether the level of turnout is higher or lower at the extreme ends of the newly categorised variable than in the middle groupings. The categories also contain a fairly even distribution of cases to compare against rates of turnout. The relationships between the variables and turnout will then be tested by carrying out correlations. Correlation is a method of establishing whether variables are related to each other. If variable 'A' implies a change in variable 'B', and we have information on how variable 'A' changes, then we can estimate how much this change can affect the value of variable 'B'. The range of the correlation coefficients will be between -1 and +1. A coefficient with a negative sign implies an inverse relationship between this variable and turnout. The closer the correlation to -1 or +1, the stronger the relationship between the two variables.

Multivariate analysis forms the second part of our quantitative investigation. The three major functions of multivariate analysis are control, interpretation and prediction. The

first two are covered by correlation, but we have to use regression to make predictions because correlation cannot express the character of a relationship. Multiple regression examines the nature and strength of a relationship between a number of independent variables and the dependent variable. It assesses the effect of each independent variable when controlling for the influence of other independent variables. In this research, we will use multiple regression with the stepwise option. This means that variables are entered one at a time into the regression equation according to their explanatory importance. At each step, the variable that explains the greatest amount of variance not explained by the variables currently in the equation is entered. This process is repeated until no more variables are significant enough to enter. The aim of the regression is to provide indicators of the relative importance of the explanatory factors in explaining the variation in local election turnout. The 'r-squared' (r^2) figures that are given throughout the thesis, show the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables used in the analysis.

We should be careful with the use of regression analysis for a number of reasons. Firstly, care needs to be shown over the decision regarding which variables are deemed to be important enough to consider in the calculations. A large number of variables have been included in the stepwise regression, but this was after deciding to omit a number of others. A piece of previous research into this topic suggested that,

> 'With a large number of independent variables we can obtain an indication of their relative importance by relating the dependent variable to each independent variable in turn, always controlling for the remaining variables. Only variables which have a statistically significant contribution to make to this explanation are included in the equation' (Rallings and Thrasher, 1994b:27).

Secondly, there should be some restraint shown over the interpretation of the results. Rose and Sullivan write that, 'regression coefficients in themselves tell us nothing about causation. They only indicate that certain variables are associated' (1996:204). Finally, when the regression analysis is carried out in the different types of local authority it is likely that we shall get very different results. We should expect these findings, because

the three types of local government are not homogenous, but have the potential to be completely different to each other in their political, structural and socio-economic make-up.

Much of this thesis will involve using both bivariate and multivariate techniques on all the different data-sets. Although the examination of turnout rates according to a number of categories does not make use of any statistical tests, it is still an important part of the analysis. We may be able to detect a relationship between an independent variable and turnout across the whole of local government. Such a finding is unlikely to be due to chance, even though the relationship may not be statistically significant, this does not mean that this variable is not important. Statistics will not be employed for their own sake, otherwise it is likely that we shall miss out on some interesting findings. Overall, the data analysis needs some focus, hence the research design of testing some hypotheses by splitting potentially important variables into categories, before going on to carry out correlations and multivariate analysis using political, structural and socio-economic data.

1.7: Qualitative research.

Due to the nature of the data, there will be variations in the level of turnout that cannot be explained by the range of independent variables at our disposal. So, after using quantitative research techniques on aggregate data to explain turnout variation, qualitative research methods can be used to explain the behaviour of the residuals. A survey concerning electoral registration and turnout in local elections was sent to all local authorities in England and Wales as part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation sponsored project into enhancing local electoral turnout. The responses from the survey form the qualitative part of the thesis that is discussed in Chapter 9. The survey asked council officers to perceive how high they thought their level of turnout to be compared to other local authorities and to suggest reasons for their answer. The survey is a particularly

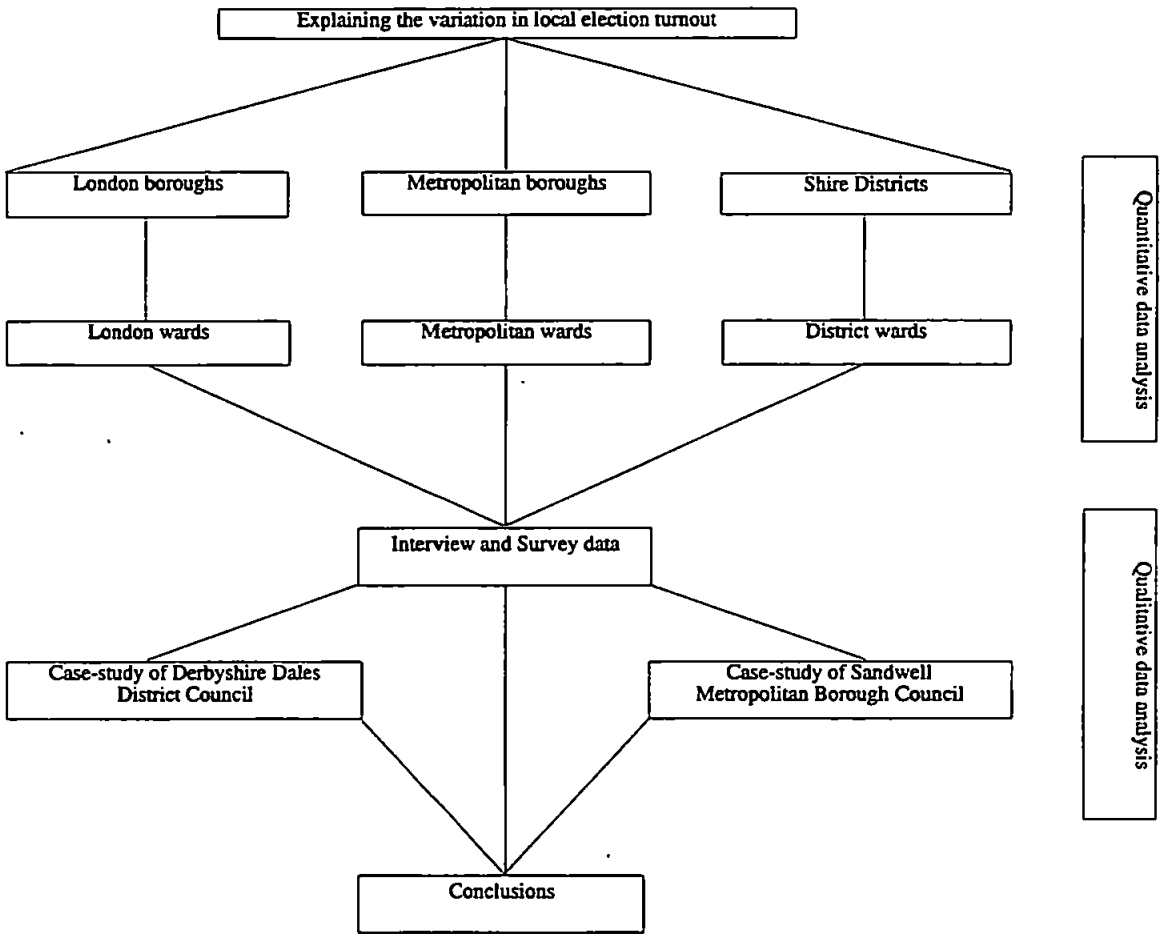
useful method of research because we can relate the answers given by our respondents to our earlier findings of the quantitative data analysis.

In addition to the survey, some of the respondents were contacted by telephone so that they could go into more detail on their answers. In two instances, Derbyshire Dales District Council and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, we visited the area and interviewed both officers and members of the councils. These two local authorities were chosen because they are good examples of places that produce consistently high (Derbyshire Dales) and low (Sandwell) levels of turnout. The findings from these interviews form the case-studies in Chapter 9.

1.8: Conclusions.

To conclude this chapter, Figure 1.1 illustrates how the thesis is mapped out. We have three types of local authorities in the data-set: the London boroughs, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts. Within these local authorities, there are two levels of electoral data - election results aggregated to the local authority level and the ward level. The aim of the thesis is to explain the variation in local election turnout. We do this by using three types of explanatory variables: political, structural and socio-economic. The socio-economic variables are derived from the censuses of 1981 and 1991. We use three main methods for investigating turnout. Relationships are tested bivariately, then multivariate techniques are employed and finally, the residual local authorities and wards are analysed. Although quantitative research methods form the major part of the thesis, qualitative methods are used to add detail to the data analysis. Results from a survey and a series of interviews are used to construct two case-studies of Derbyshire Dales District Council and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

Figure 1.1: A tree diagram illustrating the structure of the thesis



Chapter 2: Local election turnout - a neglected area for research?

2.1: Introduction.

The aim of this chapter is to review the literature on voter participation. There is no general theory on why turnout varies, research is, therefore, more of an empirical nature. This chapter will discuss the results that have been drawn from previous research, investigate the research methods used, highlight some of the methodological flaws that arose, and finally suggest areas for future enquiry that can be addressed within this thesis.

2.2: Research into turnout levels in national elections.

The study of voter participation is a relatively new area of enquiry. Crewe *et al.* write that Woodward and Roper's book entitled, 'The Political Activity of American Citizens' (1950) was, 'The first systematic empirical study of different forms of political participation' (1977:101). Since then, there have been a number of 'classic' studies such as 'The Civic Culture' (Almond and Verba, 1963), 'Political Man' (Lipset, 1963) and 'Political Participation' (Milbrath, 1965), which have all set out to develop a model of politics and to explain some of the determinants of voter turnout.

A significant amount of research has been conducted into turnout at national elections. Evidence relating to the individual level in Britain is largely confined to the work of Crewe *et al.* (1977) and Swaddle and Heath (1989). Crewe *et al.* used data from a series of surveys on political attitudes and voting behaviour to examine voter participation in the general elections of 1966, 1970, February 1974 and October 1974. Even though their analysis was based on general election data, the conclusions they make are still relevant for this thesis. As Crewe *et al.* had longitudinal data, they were able to determine from their panel how many of them voted in each election. For example, they found that, 'A mere 1% of those interviewed stayed away from the polls on all four occasions' (1977:47). This study also looked at a

number of possible determinants of participation. In order to gauge the type of non-voter, they examined social attributes such as age, sex, occupation and education and asked questions about political factors including how often they talked about politics and the strength of their party identification.

Crewe *et al.* put forward four main hypotheses. The first was that a significant proportion of those not voting in any one election fail to do so because the costs of voting rise above a certain 'threshold'. The second hypothesis was that since increases in voting costs of this kind are often temporary, (e.g. illness or moving home) non-voting is usually temporary too. Thirdly, differences between voters and non-voters in social background and political attitudes will be negligible especially between 'once-only' non-voters and regular voters. The final hypothesis suggested that persistent abstainers will consist of either, those most isolated from cultural and social pressures to vote, or those who deliberately reject such pressures and spurn the opportunity to vote, i.e. who reject the act of voting out of alienation from the British political system, or an important aspect of it.

The work of Crewe *et al.* was an example for others to follow, and is important for this thesis as they detected patterns of turnout. They found that,

> '...none of the 15 comparable democracies in the world have undergone a postwar decline in turnout that compares with that in Britain. A persistent and substantial drop in turnout is a phenomenon unique to Britain' (1977:79).

This thesis will examine whether a similar trend can be found in English local elections.

The second significant piece of research that studied turnout at the individual level in national elections was conducted by Swaddle and Heath (1989) into the discrepancy that occurs between official and reported turnout. While the official turnout rate for Great Britain in the 1987 general election was about 75%, they found that 86% of respondents to their survey reported that they voted in this election. Swaddle and Heath provided four main reasons for the discrepancy: mis-reporting by survey respondents, response bias, failure to trace all

movers and redundancy in the electoral register. Official records were used to see which people on the electoral register actually voted. The use of this method of research meant that there was no distortion of the turnout figures due to memory error.

Dyer and Jordan conducted some similar research in this subject area using marked electoral registers and survey data to examine who voted in their case-study area of Aberdeen. They concluded that, 'The distinction ...between voters and non-voters in 1979 is one of degree rather than kind' (1985:38). Studlar and Welch agree with these findings by writing that, 'Nonvoters are much like voters in specific issue opinions and in social class. They do not have a strong ideology or a markedly different attitudinal structure than their fellow citizens' (1986:139). The relevant records are available for local elections up to six weeks after the election, and can be examined under the terms of the Representation of the People Act (1983). It would, therefore, be possible to replicate the research of Dyer and Jordan for a case-study of a local authority, but this particular project lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

There have been many other pieces of research into turnout in national elections. They have produced hypotheses at the national level that may be relevant for suggesting some hypotheses at the local level. Miller (1977) for example, found that there was evidence of a stronger and developing non-linear relationship between turnout and class. Middle-class individuals and areas were more prone to vote, because they possessed many amenities that made voting easier. Mughan (1986) on the other hand, concentrated his research on the politics of turnout. He studied the political context, the candidates in the constituency and the national standing of the parties as determinants of turnout in national elections. Research into voter participation at the local level has been neglected in comparison. This point shall be emphasised by reviewing the literature on local election turnout. This will enable us to become familiarised with the current state of knowledge, the problems and hypotheses that others have studied, any significant variables, and the research methods used.

2.3: Research into turnout levels in local elections: early case-studies.

Miller writes that, 'nineteenth-century local elections were characterised by abysmally low rates of both contest and turn-out, (while) complaints about apathy towards local government elections were frequent in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s' (1988:62). Newton confirms that this pattern of turnout has continued over time. He writes that, '...the turnout rate in English county boroughs was around 50% in the late 1940s, but declined to around 40% in the mid 1950s and stabilised at that level' (1976:15). Gibson and Stewart have also found patterns of low turnout in their research. They explain that, 'the overall national average turnout in contested local elections in the 1950s and the 1960s at local authority level ranged from a low of 37.6 percent to a high of 48 percent' (1991:64).

Very little was written about turnout in local elections in the first half of the twentieth century. It was not until the late 1950s and 1960s with case-studies such as Bulpitt's (1967) investigation of the role of party politics in local government, that the study of local government and turnout was analysed in some depth. Bealey *et al.* (1965) case-study of Newcastle-under-Lyme was another good example. They asked questions such as whether abstention was larger in safe seats and whether the rate of turnout varied between towns and country and between upper tier and lower tier local authorities. They found that the level of turnout was correlated with variables such as 'knowledge of local politics' and 'satisfaction with the local council'. Birch's (1959) case-study of Glossop also discussed the issue of turnout in local elections. He carried out a survey into voting and non-voting and was concerned by how much turnout could vary according to region. For example, in the 1950s, participation in local elections was higher in the North West than in any other region, and is still relatively high in pockets of this area today. Hampton (1970) meanwhile, studied local government politics in Sheffield where they had a record of exceptionally low polls. By using survey data, he explained the level of turnout in this city by citing the predominantly working class social composition of wards and the low level of marginal wards as potential determinants of turnout. He also found that the nation-wide political temperature affected the

size of the poll and that more people voted if there is a chance, even a small one, that the seat will change hands. Another case-study of a large English city was conducted by Newton in 1976. He concluded from his analysis in Birmingham that turnout was not associated with local factors,

> '...the term 'local election' is something of a misnomer, for there is very little that is local about them, and they tell us practically nothing about the preferences and attitudes of citizens to purely local issues and events. They are determined overwhelmingly by national political considerations. Local elections are a sort of annual General Election' (1976:16).

Sharpe's (1967) book drew together case-studies of eleven cities at the time of the 1964 borough elections. One of the findings from this book was that in the immediate post-war period in metropolitan boroughs, there was an inverse relationship between turnout and the extent to which the council was dominated by the majority party, i.e. the more dominant the party, the lower the level of turnout. It was also suggested that there was a greater turnout in those contests where Liberals are included. A large number of questions that dominated the research in the decades around the 1950s and 1960s are still relevant and in need of answers today.

Finally, another case-study was carried out by Rowley in 1971. He conducted his analysis into turnout variation in elections to London from a geographical perspective. By analysing the spatial pattern of political representation based on the results of the 1964 and 1967 GLC elections, it prompted him to speculate on the existence of a concentric zonal model of voting behaviour - a central zone of Conservative boroughs (Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea), an inner ring of Labour areas composed of safe Labour and marginal Labour boroughs and a peripheral zone of Conservative boroughs. In broad terms, we would expect to find low rates of turnout in boroughs near the city while relatively high turnout figures may be found in the suburbs. The results from Rowley's investigations into these two elections,

'indicate that lower turnout is apparently associated with the safety of the seat. Conversely, large turnouts within the Marginal boroughs, are a reflection of their marginality and the often crucial importance of the individual vote or comparatively small number of votes' (1971:128).

He also found variation in rates of turnout according to the party in control of a borough. The percentage of the electorate participating in the election in safe Labour seats was only 25.5% in 1964 and 21.6% in 1967, while the turnout in safe Conservative boroughs was 46.6% and 42.2% respectively. We can infer from this that inner-city location relates to lower turnouts, but that inner-city Labour boroughs attain lower levels of participation than their Conservative neighbours. Our data analysis will discover how, if at all, the situation has changed since Rowley conducted his research over 25 years ago.

A number of articles by political scientists such as Fletcher (1969), Denver and Hands (1971), Newton (1972) and Pimlott (1973) gave a new impetus to the study of turnout. We shall now examine what these and other studies found in terms of political, structural and socio-economic determinants of turnout.

2.4: Political determinants of turnout.

We have shown that a number of political determinants of turnout have been analysed by using survey data and case-studies. The next stage of analysis laid emphasis on the aggregate study of electoral data. Political scientists found a number of characteristics influencing turnout and then used various statistical techniques to ascertain the importance of these variables. There are three main macro political explanations of turnout variation: marginality, the role of parties and electoral registration. These three points shall now be examined in turn.

Fletcher argued that,

> 'there was a very strong inverse correlation between the size of the majority in a contest and turnout. The smaller the margin between the victorious candidate and his closest opponent, the higher the proportion of electors voting was likely to have been' (1969:498).

This is not as straight-forward a statement as it may seem, as there is a problem of defining a marginal ward. Is a ward marginal if it has changed its party composition in the three preceding elections as Newton suggests in his article of 1972, or is the percentage majority of the winning candidate at the preceding election the important factor? Fletcher argues that it is the latter. His rule of thumb for marginality was 5% in parliamentary constituencies, in the sense of a seat being likely to change hands. In local government, wards with majorities of under 20% were defined as being marginal. Large swings in local elections mean the title of Mann's book: 'Unsafe at Any Margin' (1978) which referred to American congressional elections, can also be appropriate for English local elections.

The relationship between marginality and turnout is complex. Are the electorate making a rational decision that their vote could be an important factor in electing a councillor in a marginal ward? If they are, then this rationality does not have any statistical basis, because the probability of any voter being decisive in determining the outcome of a election is very small. Each vote in a local election does, however, have a greater potential to affect the outcome than a vote in a general election, because of the smaller electoral units. Another theoretical explanation of why turnout will be higher in marginal wards, is the role played by political parties in creating greater awareness amongst voters, and persuading them through canvassing and leafleting to go to the polls. It is often forgotten that there is a difference between a voter's perception of when a ward is marginal and a political party's idea of marginality. A voter may decide that their vote could make an important difference to the outcome, while a party may have written off the contest as a safe opposition seat. It is only when a party believes that a ward is marginal, can it then concentrate its efforts on influencing the turnout and thereby the outcome.

Newton (1972) suggests that Smith (in Sharpe (1967)), Heclo (1964-5) and Bealey *et al.* (1965) were the only writers who initially argued that marginality had little, if anything to do with turnout. They believed that there was no practical reason to believe that marginality was an important determinant of turnout. Newton agreed by arguing that safe Conservative wards have a relatively large proportion of middle-class electors and middle-class wards have a high turnout. In contrast, safe Labour wards have a relatively large proportion of working class electors, which normally means a low turnout. It follows that as marginal wards have a high class mix in them, their turnout should be average, and not high. This argument will be investigated in subsequent chapters. We will also have the added advantage of being able to control for some external factors such as the social variables measuring class and occupation. Davies and Newton continue on the line of argument that marginality is not very important by writing that,

> 'Although one might expect a close election contest to result in a higher than usual turnout, there is little evidence that marginality, whether measured in terms of percentage majority or in terms of party changes, does produce a high turnout' (1974:225).

Arguably, one of the most important articles written on turnout is by Denver and Hands (1974). They examined the relationship between the absolute level of turnout in a constituency in one election and the marginality in the previous election. Before this pioneering work, writers had concentrated on marginality's effect upon change in turnout from one election to another. Denver and Hands' research was based upon general election data between 1959 and 1970, but their methodology and conclusions can be useful for the study of local elections. Potential determinants of turnout such as housing, population density, growth of the electorate, minor party vote and region were put into a regression equation. The conclusions from their statistical analysis was that there was a consistent and significant relationship between previous marginality and turnout.

Denver and Hands (1985) continued with their analysis of marginality and turnout through the general elections of the 1970s. Their main finding was that previous marginality

increased the amount of variance explained by their regression equation. They suggested that the effort put into the campaign by parties may influence the rate of turnout. To test this hypothesis, they used the amount of money spent by the parties during the campaign as a surrogate indicator of campaign effort. Their results supported the hypothesis as positive correlations were found between the two variables, and expenditure explained an additional seven percentage points on average, of the variation in turnout.

The most recent study into the effect of previous marginality upon the level of turnout was carried out by Kelly (1995). He found that the relationship between previous marginality in the 1987 general election, and the level of turnout in the 1992 general election was extremely weak. These results were surprising, as they were contrary to the findings of Denver and Hands who suggested that the correlation coefficients between previous marginality and turnout were strengthening over time.

The second macro explanation of turnout variation focuses upon political parties. Byrne writes that, 'Parties simplify and crystallise the main issues for the general public' (1986:114), such that it enables the electorate easily to recognise party labels and thereby vote accordingly. Voter turnout, therefore, is likely to be higher where there is a party contest. We could hypothesise that the more parties which contest an election, the higher the level of turnout, because there is now more chance of a party representing the views or preferences of the electorate, and provoking them to vote. Research has shown that this hypothesis is true, but there is an optimum number of parties. Capron and Kruseman write that, 'the participation rate in a given country is negatively affected either by too many parties or too few' (1988:41). Too many parties may mean more chances of coalitions being formed, so that voters may not directly select the government that will govern them. Such a situation could result in citizens having less incentive to vote and may mean that turnout could be depressed in future elections.

Another piece of research which found that political parties may have an effect upon the level of local election turnout was Fletcher's article of 1969. He suggested that the presence or not of a Liberal candidate was a factor in influencing the rate of voter participation. As the work was written in the 1960s, we must recognise that although the 'Liberal' candidate can be compared to the Liberal Democrat of today, it cannot be used as an all-encompassing figure for the support of all the 'other' parties, because the Liberal party is distinctively different.

Not only can the number of parties be potentially influential in determining the level of turnout, but the amount of effort displayed by political parties to 'get the vote out' could also have an impact. Pimlott (1973) showed in his study of two wards in Newcastle, that increased party activity can have a significant effect in a ward. In the Heaton ward where the Labour canvassing was concentrated, the level of turnout rose by 8.5%, while turnout in Newcastle as a whole fell by 5.1%. The targeted canvassing from the Labour party in this ward not only improved the rate of turnout, but also resulted in the Labour share of the vote going up by 31%, while the Labour vote in the whole of Newcastle fell by 13.4%. It follows from this that parties and their representatives will be most active as campaigners in locations where they think a high turnout among their supporters is most important. These places will be marginal wards, where a ward could change hands given a small shift in the distribution of votes among the parties. The problem with Pimlott's analysis was that it was carried out on such a small scale. Even if we accept his conclusion that increased party activity can have an effect on local turnout, it is unrealistic to assume that there is the capacity for hundreds of local parties to organise themselves to concentrate on marginal wards.

A similar criticism of scale could be levelled against Denver and Bochel (1971), since they based their conclusions on the positive association between canvassing, party activity and turnout on the interviews of just 472 respondents in two blocks of flats. To counterbalance this criticism, however, the only means available to study the influence of a party at the local level is to generalise from a case-study. The problem remains that some parties are better

organised than others, so there will always be different results between analyses of heterogeneous local parties. Denver and Hands argue that, '...local parties ...are rarely efficient electoral machines' (1972:513). Some political scientists go as far as saying that activities such as canvassing are, 'rituals' (Butler and King, 1966), and that the effect of party organisation has little if any effect on the outcome (Kavanagh, 1970).

Recent research has implied that there is still no agreement on the impact of campaigning on the level of turnout. While Butler and Kavanagh argue that, 'It is hard to locate evidence of great benefits being reaped by the increasingly sophisticated and computerised local campaigning' (1992:245), Denver and Hands suggest that in the 1992 election campaign, 'Labour and Liberal Democrat constituency campaigns did significantly affect their performance'. They go on to write, however, that, '...variations in the strength of the Conservative campaigning were not associated with variations in their performance' (1995:1).

If there are going to be some campaigning effects, then Brown argues that,

> 'It is quite possible that efficient local party machines may have relatively more influence on who votes and how in local elections, than in general elections, on the hypothesis that lower voter interest in local election issues yields a relatively stronger influence to party stimuli in the total motivational pattern driving the voter to the polls' (1958:176).

We could infer from this that local party organisation has the potential to be of crucial importance, especially as the smaller size of the electorate in local elections makes it easier for parties to canvass.

Research has been carried out in other countries in support of the case that local campaigning does influence the level of turnout. Seyd and Whiteley write that,

> 'The literature on the influence of constituency election campaigns on voting in Britain is very sparse, however, in the United States, research on this issue is rather more extensive. The United States evidence has relevance for this discussion, since if local party campaigns influence the vote in a country with a weaker party system than Britain's, it is very likely that such campaigns have a significant effect in Britain' (1992:176).

Of course, it should be recognised that the party system is weaker in local elections than it is at the national level. This can be illustrated by the success of Independent candidates in local elections compared to their results in general elections. This weakened level of party competition should not reduce the impact of campaigning very much, as Independent candidates can be very efficient at campaigning in local government wards.

We can conclude this section by saying that research, on the whole, suggests that campaigning by political parties can have a positive effect on the level of turnout. The next point of interest concerns whether the candidates that the political parties pick can have a similar influence on the level of voter participation. A study of the Bradford local elections of 1963, found that the candidature of a Pakistani in a ward significantly increased the level of turnout in that contest (by nearly nine percentage points compared to the 1961 election), far outshining the increase in turnout across the city (less than four percentage points up from 1961). In this ward, 23% of registered electors were immigrants, but analysis of the voting returns shows that, '...it was the people who lived next to the immigrants, but not yet amongst them, who had increased the turnout' (Spiers and Le Lohé, 1964:89).

The third macro political determinant of turnout is electoral registration. It forms a vital part of the democratic process because the electoral register includes the names of all people who are entitled to vote. Turnout rates can be estimated with some degree of accuracy, but the precision of the turnout figures depends on the efficiency of the electoral register on which they are based. The electoral register is compiled every October to come into effect the following February. This means that the register is sixteen months old before it is taken out of circulation and replaced. As some people will move in and out of the constituency and others may die during this time, the register becomes an increasingly inaccurate

representation of the electorate in an area. It seems that the problem of producing an accurate register is getting worse. Pinto-Duschinsky writes that, '...the number of errors in electoral registers in England and Wales doubled between 1966 and 1981. By 1981 the register contained five million inaccuracies' (1987:iii). These inaccuracies are people who are registered but are not entitled to vote, and are known as 'deadwood'. Piven and Cloward (1988) argue that the proportion of deadwood is increasing and this could account for the decline in voting among registrants. This is a problem which exists across all countries. Crewe writes that, 'The precise impact of the register's inefficiency in each country is impossible to assess, but in many cases the error is likely to amount to three or four percentage points' (1981:233).

Not only is there a problem with the accuracy of the register because of deadwood, but the register can also miss people off who are eligible to vote. Todd and Butcher (1982) found from 1981 OPCS figures, that effective non-registration runs at between 6.5% in the country as a whole and can be as high as an average 14.4% in Inner London. Non-registration is high amongst certain groups of people, especially the young and ethnic minorities. Non-registration has an important impact on the level of turnout, because it does not give a clear picture of 'real' turnout. Pinto-Duschinsky prophesied in 1987 that, 'According to some registration officers, the introduction of the poll tax system would increase problems of electoral registration' (1987:30). This comment turned out to be true, because as McLean and Smith observe, 'Our best estimate of the total shortfall from the electoral registers due to the poll tax is approximately 600,000' (1995:138).

A couple of problems arise from this observation. The first is that although there have been estimates, we do not know the exact number of people who failed to register. This means that the problem could, in fact, be worse than the original estimate. Secondly, we do not know what the effect this loss of people would have had on the level of turnout. It may have artificially raised the average rate of turnout and been mistakenly attributed to factors such as increased local political activity. Rose (1974) has worked out a formula to adjust the level of

turnout because of the problems with the electoral register. It is as follows: Official turnout + 3.4% (not registered) - 1% (registered twice) - 1.5 m% (effect of deaths) - 0.67m% (effect of removals), where m equals the months from the date of the register's compilation. This formula was first introduced over 20 years ago, and so it might now need to be updated, especially as the accuracy of the register has seemed to decline over this time.

It is possible to have an electoral register that is completely accurate at the time it was compiled, but the larger the local authority, the more difficult it is to achieve this end. On the other hand, a turnout rate of 100% is nearly impossible to achieve. If the turnout figure is greater than 100%, then the election has either been rigged, or the voting figures were based upon a very inaccurate register. The Bosnian election of 1996 provides us with a good example. According to some estimates, this election produced a turnout of 107%. This figure was the result of alleged fraud and the difficulty of estimating the total electorate. It is possible, however, to get a level of turnout around 90%. This would be a situation where all citizens of voting age were enrolled on an up-to-date electoral register and most of them voted. Countries like Australia and Sweden would fit into this category. To reiterate, the first thing that a country needs to achieve high rates of turnout is an accurate register.

To increase levels of turnout in this country from about 40% in local elections and 70-75% in general elections, is not an unrealistic task and can be linked to electoral registration. In an attempt to increase turnout in the United States of America, they have introduced what is known as the 'motor voter' rule (National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)), whereby states must give eligible citizens the opportunity to register to vote at motor vehicle bureau's when they come in to renew their driving license (hence 'motor-voter'). The NVRA requires state agencies to register citizens when they get Food Stamps and Medicaid, as well as at agencies that provide services to people with disabilities. The aim of this scheme is to increase the accuracy of registration from its current level of about 63% to 95%, and will aim to have the effect of increasing turnout rates. Turnout among potential eligible voters in the United States presidential elections is only 50-55%. Of course, getting more people on the register

may lead to a fall in the level of turnout if those newly registered people do not vote. Grofman believes that this is unlikely to be the case. He argues that,

> '...registration requirements are a serious barrier to political participation ...at present a very high proportion of voters who are registered do actually vote - at least in presidential elections. So, it is safe to say that turnout will rise if motor voter is effectively implemented and many voters are as a result registered' (1995:125).

There are also suggestions in the United States of America to have election day registration, and registration sites at unemployment offices. All of these proposals should ease the access to the ballot box amongst current non-voters who are disproportionately low income, blue collar, unemployed, minority workers and the young.

2.5: Structural determinants of turnout.

The second group of possible determinants of local turnout are structural variables. One view is that the size of an electoral area will inversely affect the level of turnout. Size is a determinant that can be investigated in a number of respects. At the macro-level, Blais and Carty have suggested that, '...the smaller the country the greater the sense of community and so the greater the participation' (1990:172). While in local government, Fletcher writes that,

> '...there is a marked inverse correlation between (the) size of local authority and average ward turnout. The average turnout in wards with contested elections ranged from 46.0 per cent in towns with populations of less than 50,000 to 32.3 per cent in towns with more than half-a-million inhabitants' (1969:495).

At the ward level, the size of the electorate is also believed to be an important determinant of turnout. There is a very wide range in the size of ward electorates in local government. In our data-set the largest ward in Liverpool, for example, has 15,073 electors, which compares to only 4,535 electors in that borough's smallest sized ward. This variation in ward electorates provides scope for the rate of turnout to vary according to this variable. Fletcher has found that, '...average ward turnout is also very strongly correlated to (the) size of ward, ranging from 54.4 per cent in wards with less than 2,000 electors to 34.3 per cent

in wards with electorates of 10,000 or more' (1969:495). Rallings and Thrasher examined this relationship using more recent data. They found that, 'In 1991 nearly six in ten people voted in wards with an electorate of less than 1,000, but only 44 per cent did so where the electorate was more than 6,000' (1992:3). This variable will be analysed throughout the thesis to see in which type of local authority, if at all, it is important.

Another piece of research that looked at ward size (in this case the physical size of a ward) and turnout, was conducted by Taylor in Swansea in 1975. He hypothesised that turnout was correlated to the distance the voter was away from the polling station, so that the closer he or she was, the increased likelihood that a vote would be cast. The results from one ward show that, of those who lived within one minute of the polling station, their turnout was 65%, while the proportion of the electorate voting who lived between five and six minutes away was a lowly 35%. When we focus down to the ward level, we can find some interesting results, but the determinants of turnout may be specific to each individual ward. Taylor, for example, argued that the reason for the low turnout in two of the polling districts in his study was due to the very steep slope of the streets leading to the polling station!

A final structural variable that can be tested in our analysis, is the relationship between turnout and district magnitude, i.e. the number of seats in a ward. There does not seem to be any literature on this specific area, but we would hypothesise that turnout is likely to be higher in single-member wards. As single-member wards tend to be smaller in electorate size than multi-member wards, and we suggested that size is likely to be inversely related to turnout, then we may assume that the relationship for this variable will be in the same direction.

2.6: Socio-economic determinants of turnout.

The main political and structural determinants of turnout have been outlined, so we shall now turn our attention to another potentially important factor that may influence the level of

turnout in local elections, socio-economic variables. These variables should not be overlooked, because as Newton writes,'...no explanation of local elections is likely to be satisfactory unless the influence of social factors is considered alongside the political factors' (1972:255).

There is great debate over the significance of personal characteristics and their relationship to political participation. Tingsten (1963) suggested that there was a strong positive link between participation and socio-economic status. Political participation is more rational a choice for some -those relatively rich in politically relevant resources -than for others less advantaged. As for electoral participation, (i.e. voting), because it is such an easy task, it is argued that resources are largely irrelevant. Parry *et al.* (1992) confirm this by examining a number of individual resources such as education and wealth to see how well they were related to turnout. The results from their sample show that voting defies the general rule about participation, as the best educated were the least active. The results for wealth indicate a positive relationship to turnout, but when other variables were taken into account, the relationship weakens. It could, therefore, be concluded that such personal characteristics as education, income and higher status occupations, which facilitate most forms of political participation, are not very important regarding voter turnout. Bingham Powell Jr. supports this conclusion by writing that,

> 'The studies of individual participation have suggested that such personal characteristics as education, income, and higher-status occupations which facilitate most forms of political participation, are rather unrelated to voting participation' (1982:120).

There is, however, some disagreement over this point. Rallings and Thrasher, for example found that, 'turnout is negatively correlated with low economic status and with other measures of material well-being' (1990:85). Crewe takes the middle-ground in this argument by writing that there is a, 'puzzle: at the individual level income and education are related to turnout; on the aggregate level they are not' (1981:260).

Crewe *et al.* (1977) cite two important sources of irregular voting: relative youth and a weak or absent party identification. The Maud Report came to the conclusion that, 'those with the most unfavourable attitudes to voting are likely to be women, (and) to be under 35 and over 64' (cited in Byrne, 1983:101). Results from a survey of local elections indicates that the young are not only more likely to mis-report about their failure to vote, but also less likely to vote than any other social category. Miller (1988) found that 48% of the 'young' (under 35) intended to vote, while 44% actually said they did so in the election of 1986. This compares to the figures of 75% intending to vote and 63% actually voting for those 'old' people aged over 55. Parry *et al.* write that, 'Turnout is the one area where ...the elderly are more active than the population as a whole' (1992:170). With regard to the strength of party identification, Butler and Stokes (1969) found that this was the strongest influence on turnout in general elections, and that it was a similarly powerful influence on voting in local elections.

Another personal factor that may have the potential to account for variation in the level of turnout is gender. Milbrath wrote that, 'The finding that men are more likely to participate in politics than women is one of the most thoroughly substantiated in social science' (1965:116). If we define participation in politics as voting, then there are at least two separate pieces of research that argue with this point. Crewe *et al.* suggest that,

> '...the well-known tendency throughout liberal democracies for women to vote in smaller proportions than men is not only statistically insignificant in British elections but attributable to their greater longevity rather than to their sex' (1977:59).

The second piece of research was conducted by Parry *et al.* They found that, '...there is a gender gap (in voter turnout), -but one that favours women rather than men ...this is more true of local and European contests' (1992:145).

Three other social variables were deemed by Crewe *et al.* (1977) and Swaddle and Heath (1989) to be important determinants of turnout. They are marital status, length of residence and housing tenure. Crewe *et al.* found that there was a significant relationship between

marital status and turnout regularity, and this finding was supported by data collected by Swaddle and Heath. Of course, this result may just be the consequence of unmarried people being more likely to be young and more mobile than other sections of the population. The second factor studied by both sets of researchers was the length of residence. Crewe *et al.* found that those people who had lived at their address for less than three years were the least likely to turn out to vote on a regular basis. The results from Swaddle and Heath's analysis was that turnout was lowest when respondents had lived in the same address for less than one year.

Linked to the factors of mobility and length of residence influencing the rate of turnout, is a social variable studied by Denver and Halfacree (1992). They investigated the importance of migration as a determinant of turnout variation. Their results show that, 'out-migration is strongly and negatively related to turnout' (1992:250). This finding was expected, because people who move home will face greater costs in voting than those who do not move, as movers will have to re-register. Denver and Halfacree write that, 'Migration is confined to a relatively small proportion of the electorate (about 10 per cent of the population change their address annually)' (1992:254), so although the topic is worthy of study at the national level and can be investigated, it would be very complex to measure out-migration in local government wards.

The final social variable studied by Crewe *et al.* and Swaddle and Heath was housing tenure. Swaddle and Heath found that the turnout of private tenants was less than any other group, (one percentage point below local authority housing), thereby agreeing with Crewe *et al.*, but also that the turnout of local authority tenants also seems to be significantly lower than owner-occupiers (six percentage points in this case). Not too much should be read into the importance of this variable because Swaddle and Heath found that, '...all effects of housing type disappear when controls for social class are introduced' (1989:547).

The importance of social determinants of turnout can change over time. Miller found that in the 1966 general election, 'The best predictor of turnout was AMEN, 'the percent of houses with full 'amenities', a bath, hot water, and an indoor toilet'. It explained over a third of turnout variation' (1977:63). Similarly, Rose found that the best correlation with turnout was the variable, 'Percentage of the electorate with a telephone' (1974). Variables such as these are now outdated because of the proportion of the electorate who have full amenities and a telephone. Indicators of wealth such as class and home ownership may, however, explain a similar amount of variation in research conducted today.

Another important determinant of local turnout that can be grouped under the heading of socio-economic variables, is the effect of place. There are wide variations of both voting choice and turnout between areas, but concentration is often focused on the national state of the parties and the national turnout level at local elections, with little regard for geography. The significant regional variations that always arise are often neglected and the reasons for the deviations remain unanswered. Do they reflect a genuine local effect of place? Do they simply represent the social composition of the locality and are therefore just a local sub-set of a nation-wide behavioural pattern? Or, is the turnout variation due to a combination of both these factors?

Research has shown that there is a long-standing geographical element to voting, where differences according to local and regional culture produce spatial variations in the support given to the various political parties (Johnston, Pattie and Allsopp, 1988). We are interested in discovering whether the level of turnout can be influenced by the same factors. Variations in the level of turnout may be the result of truly regional factors deriving from local history, tradition and culture. Some parliamentary seats in Wales and Scotland, for example, have higher rates of turnout than would be expected, and the variation in turnout can not be explained by any other factor apart from what makes these places 'different'. The higher rates of turnout in this case may be due to the Welsh and Scottish nationalist parties

generating more mobilisation and interest than the English equivalent of a third party, (i.e. the Liberal Democrats).

Turnout in London has recently been consistently higher than in the metropolitan boroughs - are geographical factors the reason for this situation? It seems that geography is not important in this case, as local issues may provide us with an explanation. This can be shown by the great variation in turnout between areas according to the particular context. For example, in the local election to the Millwall ward in 1994, the turnout of 67% was higher than the figure achieved in the parliamentary constituency of Bow and Poplar in 1992 (66%), of which the Millwall ward is a component part. To qualify this point made about turnout being higher in London than in the metropolitan boroughs, Rallings and Thrasher argue that,

> 'It may well be that the public finds a greater electoral salience in being able to re-elect or throw out an entire council at periodic intervals, rather than being asked to vote more frequently but with perhaps less impact on political control locally' (1992:3).

The question why turnout is high in a particular area on the whole remains unanswered, but the effect of locality should be considered. If the reasons for the existence of 'deviant' areas can be ascertained, it may be possible to re-create the conditions, so that voter participation can be increased in other areas.

Not only does geography have the potential to be an important variable, but the nature of the social context may influence the propensity of individuals to vote. Denver and Hands (1974) found that constituencies in which miners formed a substantial proportion of the work-force frequently had higher than predicted rates of turnout. A possible explanation for this variation, could be attributed to the observation that mining areas are often epitomised as traditional tightly knit working-class communities. Eagles and Erfle (1989) researched this area by studying the influence of 'community cohesion'. This variable was based on the geographic relationship between homes and workplaces in a constituency. If they are close together, then work mates are likely to be neighbours. The variables they used were 'walk'

and 'balk' (bike or walk), which were meant to signify that these are individuals for whom work and home are close. This seemed to be a dubious operationalisation and so the results should be treated with caution. The authors argued that the subject was worthy of attention because although the importance of community characteristics as determinants of levels of political participation have long been recognised, there has been little effort to investigate their relationship with turnout. The conclusion of the work indicated that the magnitude of the impact of community cohesion on turnout was disappointingly small. This result was not particular surprising, because the research was based on general elections where constituencies are probably too large for communities to exist. There is more likelihood of 'community cohesion' having an impact in local elections where some of the wards are small enough for some sort of 'community spirit' to exist.

2.7: Miller's research into local election turnout.

The evidence on the determinants of turnout is mostly unrelated. Most studies have concentrated on one factor that the author(s) deemed to be important and disregarded the influence of many other related factors. This section will discuss a piece of research which not only studied some social factors that have been briefly discussed above, but also concentrated upon many other factors that may be significant. Miller's report for the Widdicombe Committee (1986a and 1986b), based on an NOP survey (1985/6) and the extension of this work in 'Irrelevant Elections' (1988), broke new ground in the analysis of voter participation in British local government elections.

Miller's report was the largest government-sponsored national survey of attitudes to local government for 20 years, since the rather differently focused Government Social Survey for the Maud Committee in 1965. Before we discuss the findings of the research, as the project was conducted on behalf of the government, we should be aware of the political importance of the survey's findings and the possibility of bias. There is also the more likely possibility

that the Widdicombe committee's interpretations of the survey may be likely to be unbalanced.

Miller's survey aimed to answer many important questions concerning local government, that had not previously been subjected to in-depth investigation. The questions covered five broad themes: the public awareness and knowledge of local government, public satisfaction with the standard of local services, their experience of complaining about local decisions, their views on the relationship between local authorities and the national government and of most concern to our analysis, their opinions in respect of local elections and the operation of the local democratic system. The only research method used to answer the questions outlined above was a survey.

The first part of Miller's research relevant to this thesis was his explanatory model of voter turnout. The aim of a model is to simplify the problem under discussion with the use of potentially many related terms, that can be represented diagramatically. Miller concluded from the panel's responses that political participation can best be understood in terms of two broad factors: personal characteristics, which can be indicated with the use of survey questions about a respondent's age, sex, employment status, education and class, etc. and, psychological involvement, assessed by a respondent's interest in local and national politics and knowledge of local politics. When these two factors combine with institutional constraint or mobilisation, the level of participation could be predicted. This so-called two-step model has to take account of both national and local factors, so it is known in full as being a two-step, two-level model of voting turnout. The relative strength of each level is important in understanding the variation in turnout and turnout trends in local government elections.

The aim of this model was to predict levels of turnout. A great advantage of using a survey is that there is evidence from the panel to measure the accuracy of the model. As the survey was carried out in two-waves, we are able to see if there is any difference between intentions

and behaviour. Secondly, we can see whether Miller's hypotheses concerning the apathetic nature of the electorate to participate in local elections are indeed true.

Miller found in his analysis that there was a marked difference between turnout intentions and actual turnout in local elections. While the unemployed showed in November a very low level of intention to turn out, their actual turnout the following May was average. The middle-class electors (the ABC1's) on the other hand showed a strong inclination to vote, but this promise was not carried out at the polling stations any more than working-class electors. Miller also found that psychological involvement (knowledge, interest, discussion) did influence local election turnout, but was itself largely a reflection of psychological involvement with national politics. Data from Miller's survey showed that strong feelings of identification with political parties were positively correlated with turnout intention and actual behaviour. For example, 79% of the respondents with 'very strong' party identification intended to vote compared to 30% with no identification. Miller was now in a better position to build up a picture of the likely participants in local elections.

Miller's survey was the most elaborate ever carried out on political attitudes to local elections in Britain. There are, however, a number of problems with the survey which mean that we might question his findings. The first weakness of the survey was the size of the sample. From the original 1,145 respondents in the first wave of interviews, nearly a third were not included in the panel of 745 respondents. Miller's observations were based entirely on the results of the panel survey. If the panel was unrepresentative, then his findings might be misleading. Miller does, however, recognise this point by admitting that, 'Our sample is fairly small' (1988:188), but continues,

> 'We can measure the representativeness of the panel very easily however, by comparing the answers given in November 1985 by the 745 panel members, with the answers given then by the full 1145 of the random sample (which of course includes the 745 in the 1145') (1988:250).

The result of this test (taking a two per cent margin between answers as a boundary) is that there was, 'no panel bias at all' (1988:250) on a long list of variables. Despite this result, the small sample size means that his results should be treated with a degree of caution. This is particularly true when Miller is forced to work with a subset of the full sample. For example, on one occasion he initially restricts his analysis to those who had a local election preference in May (which contained 91% of the whole panel). Then, he further restricts the table to include only those who actually voted in May. Further on in his analysis, when he only uses those respondents who voted 'for the candidate', the sample is so small that his conclusions may be in doubt because the statistical margin for sampling error is now so large.

A second major criticism of Miller's research methods is the timing of the survey. The first wave of interviews were conducted in November 1985, which was a time of no political significance. The only advantage of using the data collected at this time would be to contrast it with a survey carried out at election time in the future, and this is what Miller intended to do. The re-interviewing, however, took place the next May, which was a time when most people would not have had the opportunity to vote, so the sample size is reduced further. If one follows this process through, then the small sample is depressed even further if Miller is analysing actual voting choice, because even amongst those who were able to vote, many did not do so. In Miller's defence, however, he argues that regardless of whether the respondents had an opportunity to vote in an election or not, May 1986 was local election time for everyone in Britain in the sense that local election campaigning and news was transmitted through the mass media. He then goes on to weaken his case, by suggesting that the existence of a local election in an area did, '...have a small but coherent impact upon public attitudes. They raised the political temperature a little' (1988:202).

Despite these criticisms, Miller's survey remains the most extensive survey of attitudes towards local politics in Britain. While previous research into voting behaviour in local elections concentrated on a single factor, for example, Denver and Hands (1971) on the

significance of canvassing and Pimlott's (1973) inquiry on the effect of party organisation, Miller attempted to examine a wide range of factors. It is a pity that there has been no comparable survey to Miller's, so we could point out likenesses and differences of the conclusions. If there was an attempt to duplicate Miller's work, some of the methodological flaws could be eradicated, and we could also see how the local political situation might have changed over time. Our examination of case-studies and the research into the political, structural and socio-economic determinants of turnout, indicates that there is room for further research in this important field of study, especially if we use aggregate data as we do in this thesis.

2.8: Problems with analysing turnout.

We have outlined the research into turnout at both the national and local level and discussed the research findings relating to the three different types of independent variables. A number of problems appear to have arisen when studying voter participation.

The first problem that should concern us when studying turnout is the difficulty in examining turnout figures between countries. Despite the common assumption that voting is a universally simple act, there is a spectacular range in turnout across countries. It must, therefore, be remembered that we are not comparing like with like. Rose illustrates this point,

> 'We would expect average levels of voting participation in a society to be shaped by a wide variety of factors. These would include the values and skills of its citizens, the issues and problems of the society, the legal and constitutional rules, and the political structures which link the individual voters to collective outcomes' (1980:9).

These factors can vary significantly between countries and thereby can explain some of the variation in turnout. Miller writes that,

> 'In countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark ...great stress is laid upon local government as an important government institution, and where the continued independence of local authorities is valued' (1986b:147).

Hoffman-Martinot *et al.* use France to make a similar point,

> 'In France local government has a more secure constitutional base. Municipalities have wide discretion in the policies they pursue and mayors are figures of significance who can attract both loyalty and disfavour. Citizens identify with their communes and believe that their vote is worth casting in its own right' (1996:255).

Levels of turnout in these countries mentioned above are high compared to England where local government is not held in such high esteem. Turnout in English local elections has never been high, so to make comparisons between countries whose turnout is now at the same level as this country, but in the past has been significantly higher or lower, is to miss an important point.

There are also a number of other difficulties with comparing turnout rates across countries. The first point is that in some countries the electorate have to register themselves instead of the government doing it for them automatically. The best example of this is the United States of America, which, 'is the only country where the entire burden of registration falls on the individual rather then the government' (Glass *et al.*, 1984:52). Research has shown that the American States' voter registration requirements can partially explain why their level of turnout is lower relative to the rates across Western Europe (Bingham Powell Jr., 1986: Jackman, 1987). A caveat to this problem is that these different rules and procedures that exist between states have more effect upon the turnout of those persons with little or no formal education (Bauer, 1990). So, not only does the issue of registration have an effect upon turnout, but the political outcome of the election can also be affected.

The wide variations in voter participation that occur between countries are usually attributed to cultural and historical factors, and differing institutional arrangements. We have mentioned above that electoral registration is one such institutional difference that exists between countries, but the most important institutional difference because of its effect upon turnout are compulsory voting laws. In Belgium and parts of Australia, voting is compulsory. This inevitably raises levels of voter participation, and in these particular

countries, turnout is on average about 85%. Jackman writes that, 'mandatory voting laws increases turnout by 13 points in the three countries where they apply' (1987:415). This point is backed up by research carried out by Irwin (1974) into the impact of compulsory voting legislation on voter turnout in the Netherlands. He found that if the aim of the law was to increase voter participation, then it was definitely successful. This was because during the 53 years that the legislation was in force, voter turnout was consistently above 90%; in the first election after the repeal of the law, turnout was only 68%. This led Irwin to comment that, 'one may conclude that between 10 to 25% of the eligible Dutch voters were influenced by the compulsory voting legislation' (1974:294). When turnout is studied across countries, we should be aware of all the differences that can exist between countries culturally, historically and institutionally, before any generalisations are made.

The level of local election turnout in Britain is similar to countries such as the United States of America, Canada and those parts of Australia where voting is not compulsory. Perhaps, there should not be so much concern about the level of turnout when rates are compared between countries and over time, or in a local government context, between local authorities and wards, because some countries, local authorities and wards will always have to appear below the average. In this country, more than the majority vote in general elections, so why should it matter that turnout is ten or 20 percentage points lower here in local elections, than it is in other countries. The problem lies in where the line is drawn concerning the critical level of turnout in local elections. If we decide that a turnout of 51% is needed to indicate a healthy level of participation, then many local election contests do not meet the standard with a corresponding question mark over the health of local democracy.

Other significant factors that need to be considered when analysing turnout rates across countries, is that each country has its own type and degree of party competition. We have previously mentioned that turnout can be positively related to the nature of party politics, so the low turnout in the non-partisan cities of the United States of America can be partially explained in this way.

Finally, the type of electoral system that a country uses does have an effect upon the level of turnout in elections. Research carried out on 20 countries in 509 national elections by Blais and Carty has shown that, '...everything else being equal, turnout is 7 percentage points lower in a plurality system, and 5 percentage points lower in a majority system as compared with PR' (1990:179). Bingham Powell Jr. writes that, 'with proportional representation from the nation as a whole or from large districts, parties have an incentive to mobilise everywhere. With single-member districts, some areas are written off as hopeless' (1986:21). This latter point is most certainly the case in British local government, where some wards are unopposed, and there are many more instances of parties putting up paper candidates, because they believe that they have little chance of winning the contest.

This chapter has reviewed the main findings of research conducted into turnout at both the national and local level. It has shown that research into local election turnout has been neglected. Our research will be able to build upon the existing evidence and seek the answers to some new questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology.

3.1: Introduction.

This chapter will begin by outlining these data on which the thesis is based and the problems arising from its use. It will then discuss the advantages and disadvantages of aggregate data analysis, before considering the possible determinants of turnout in the data-set and suggesting hypotheses to test using the three different types of explanatory variables: political, structural and socio-economic.

3.2: The data.

This thesis uses a machine-readable data-base that was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council and compiled by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher at the University of Plymouth. It includes details of more than 100,000 election results. These data have been collected from 1973 onwards (1964 for the London boroughs) and covers all local elections in England and Wales. The data-base contains information on the candidates, the party labels, incumbency and, in the case of multi-member wards, where the individual was placed within the party slate of candidates. Hence, it provides a wealth of important information that is vital to the study of local elections. This piece of research concentrates on a particular area of the data-base, that of voter turnout in local elections. Turnout is defined in this study as the percentage of eligible people in an electoral unit who cast a valid ballot.

3.3: Problems with the data.

We have identified a number of problems with the turnout data. The first difficulty is one of missing data where the turnout figures for some local authorities are no longer available. In other local authorities, although we have the votes for each political party in all contests, we do not have the figures for the electorate. Turnout is calculated as the number of ballot papers issued as a percentage of the total electorate. In single-member wards there is no

problem in calculating this figure. If, however, we do not know the number of spoilt ballot papers then this turnout figure may not be completely accurate. Even in single-member wards, the compilers of the data-base found little consistency in the way that some local authorities have calculated turnout.

Another problem with the accuracy of the turnout figures concerns the calculation of turnout in multi-member wards. Electors in such wards have the option of using fewer than their allotted ration of votes. This means that if we only have the electorate figure and the votes for each party, it is impossible to produce a totally accurate figure for turnout. For this we would need to know the number of valid ballot papers and this is not always recorded. The partial solution to this problem was to use an algorithm to estimate total vote. This thesis uses these calculated turnout figures where the original data is missing. This calculated figure assumes that a party's best-placed candidate can be used to best measure that party's vote.

The best way to understand how the algorithm works is to use a few examples. In a three member ward that has the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats all putting forward their full slate of candidates, the algorithm will take an average of the votes for the three candidates of each party to calculate total vote. A turnout figure can then be produced from these calculations. If a major party does not field a full slate of candidates, then the number of candidates that stand for this party becomes the basis for working out the average. For example, if the Liberal Democrats field only one candidate against three each from the Conservative and the Labour parties, then the vote of the candidate with the highest vote for all three parties will be used to calculate total vote. There are many instances of Independent candidates standing for election in local government, so these candidates are not ignored by the algorithm. If they were to be excluded, then we would not get the best possible estimation of the total vote. The algorithm works in the following way in this instance: if there are two Independent candidates in the same three member ward, then the average vote will be taken. If more than three Independent candidates stand for election,

then the algorithm groups them according to the number of seats available. This means, for example, that if six Independents compete in a ward, we take the vote of the first and the fourth Independent candidate (See Appendix 1 for more detail).

3.4: Aggregate data analysis of turnout.

By analysing a large amount of aggregate data, we can compare our findings to previous research, while also developing new areas of investigation. Chapter 2 has shown that much of the previous research on turnout concentrated on only limited aspects of the area of study, and used mostly bivariate or 'control table' interpretations of the data. Panel studies and surveys have concentrated on individual voting behaviour. There have been in-depth investigations into the importance of individual level variables, including age, sex, occupation, education and religion, but a smaller amount of research has been conducted into the link between voter turnout and the aggregate attributes of electorates. Although Miller (1988) produced interesting results from his survey, he could not include such political variables as the number of candidates, the parties competing for election and the political context of the election.

A problem with individual level data is that many of the variables used are tightly interrelated. This makes it difficult to unravel the real relationship of each variable to turnout. By using statistical techniques such as correlation and multiple regression on aggregate level data, we can identify in greater detail the causal influences on the dependent variable. Consequently, a regression equation could be produced to help explain variations in turnout.

There are a number of advantages resulting from the use of aggregate data. The first is that we are able to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of turnout variation across different types of local government. Secondly, we can analyse change in the influence of the independent variables over a series of elections. Another advantage is that there is a vast

amount of aggregate data at our disposal covering elections over a 20 year period (more in the case of the London boroughs).

Aggregate data are a very useful source because as the figures refer to the whole population, there are no sampling errors. They reflect actual behaviour, while surveys provide data of what people report they did. Results from surveys investigating turnout can be inaccurate because people say that they voted when they did not actually do so. Miller (1988) found in his survey that reported turnout was more than ten percentage points higher than actual turnout in the 1985 county elections in England. A similar pattern was detected by Swaddle and Heath (1989) from their study of the 1987 general election.

Aggregate data are usually interval which means that the most powerful statistical techniques can be used and the potential relationships between our explanatory variables and turnout can be investigated in the greatest detail. Another advantage of using aggregate data is that some variables are attributes of aggregates and not individuals, e.g. cohesiveness (Eagles and Erfle, 1989) and differences according to location (Johnston, e.g. 1985, 1988). Aggregate data analysis has led to real advances in our understanding of the association between social characteristics and voting and it will help us to explain the variation in local election turnout.

Aggregate data studies do, however, suffer a number of drawbacks. The first problem is that of the 'ecological fallacy'. This is a term originally coined by W.S. Robinson and occurs when relationships are estimated at one level of analysis, (e.g. collectivities) and then extrapolated to another level, (e.g. individuals). Robinson (1950) found that correlations at the aggregate level were nearly always stronger than those for the same variables at the individual level. Sometimes, two coefficients could actually have different signs. Similarly, if we find strong positive correlations between being an owner-occupier and turnout, Denver writes that, 'We cannot infer ...that owner-occupiers turn out in greater numbers than other people. Rather the figures tell us the greater the proportion of owner-occupiers in a constituency the higher, usually, is the turnout' (1989:117).

Many causal relationships can not be detected by national averages because the local social context explains much of the variance, therefore, the area of investigation must be studied from a different angle. Dogan and Derivy argue that,

> 'A representative sample collects isolated individuals, defines only individual characteristics, and consequently is unable to detect the social environmental factors in individual behaviour. It would be theoretically possible to replicate the same surveys in different social contexts. This is ...a way to avoid simultaneously the individual and ecological fallacy' (1988:266).

Another solution would be to analyse local government by regions, or constituencies, so the problems of territorial diversity could be overcome.

Kelley and McAllister take another line of attack on aggregate data analysis in their observation that,

> 'Most researchers have resorted to unsystematic fishing expeditions, throwing dozens of census variables into an ad hoc pool of potential predictors, extracting a few of them on the basis of their relation to voting behaviour, and then attempting to make conceptual sense of the heterogeneous assortment of predictors that emerge' (1983:461).

They argue that the result of this, '...leads to highly speculative, and occasionally tortured interpretations of the meaning of the variables that emerge' (1983:461) and secondly, there is a statistical weakness which arises because of the large number of highly correlated variables used. Kelley and McAllister go on,

> 'With highly correlated variables, the statistical problems of multicollinearity are very great, particularly since the number of units of analysis is typically modest. It is easy to obtain unstable results which depend on small, chance differences among highly correlated predictors' (1983:462).

Their solution to these problems was to use factor analysis. This is a statistical method that uses multiple-item scales rather than a larger number of single-item scales. Rallings and Thrasher (1990) used this technique for their study of turnout in local elections using political and socio-economic data.

There is also the problem of using certain variables in aggregate data analysis. Crewe and Payne for example, criticised Barnett's regression model because he used variables such as the percentage exclusive use of a toilet, the percentage owning more than one car and the percentage of females over 65, as determinants of the Labour vote. They suggest that, '...nobody would seriously wish to claim that three of the main reasons why people vote Labour are that they do not have at least two cars and the exclusive use of a toilet and that they are not old women' (1976:213). In response, however, the use of variables such as these are not necessarily problematic if it can be shown that they indicate some underlying social phenomenon.

Finally, Denver (1994) discusses a number of other disadvantages of using aggregate data. The first problem is using data that have been officially collected and published. These data may have been manipulated in such a way that the results are biased in the direction of those who have supplied the data. This thesis uses a data-set that has been collected independently from the state, so there are no problems in this respect. One of the biggest disadvantages of aggregate data is that it does not tell us anything about the beliefs, attitudes and opinions of voters. By definition, the data refers to collectivities, so that it allows us to investigate the behaviour of wards, regions, and constituencies, but not the behaviour of individuals. Denardo writes that, 'As always in aggregate studies, we shall have to rely upon simplifying assumptions that inescapably sacrifice detail or realism in some respects in order to recover information that would otherwise remain inaccessible' (1987:437).

3.5: The variables in the data-base.

The data-base includes a similar set of variables at both the local authority and the ward level. These make up the independent variables which we believe may influence the level of turnout in local elections. These variables can be categorised as being 'political', 'structural' and 'socio-economic'. The values of the independent variables will inevitably vary considerably both between and within the three types of local authorities. This will enable

us to measure the effect these differences may have on the level of local turnout. Before these data are analysed, we shall construct hypotheses using the three types of variables that will be tested at both the local authority and the ward level. These hypotheses have been suggested in light of the previous research carried out into turnout that was discussed in Chapter 2.

3.6: Political variables.

The political variables include the number of major parties contesting an election, the number of candidates in an election, the strength of political parties (measured by the party share of the vote) and the marginality of a contest. These variables will now be considered in turn.

3.6.1: Party competition.

One of the variables that measures party competition is the number of major political parties competing in an election. The major political parties were defined as being the Conservative party, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats. It is proposed that the greater the level of party competition, i.e. the more parties that compete in an election, the higher the resulting level of turnout. Similarly, it was suggested that the more candidates there are in an election, the higher the turnout. The reasoning behind these hypotheses is that the more parties or candidates in an election, the greater the chance they will cover the ideological spectrum and hence appeal to the broad mass of the electorate. Extra parties may also bring with them more campaigning and canvassing, that may in turn also influence whether people turn out to vote.

Another variable within the area of party competition is one that measures the party share of the vote. The hypothesis in this case, is the higher the share of the vote for any one of three major parties in a ward, the lower the level of turnout. The logic for this is that this variable indicates the closeness of a contest. The variable will be split into a number of categories, so

we can measure the level of turnout according to the share of the vote once a party receives more than the majority of the vote. For example, if a party receives 80% of the vote, they will be at least 60% ahead of the second placed candidate in a contest, which would indicate that the contest could be regarded as being 'very safe' for the winning candidate. In wards defined as being 'very safe', we would expect low levels of turnout. There is some doubt whether this hypothesis will be consistent across party lines. A very high share of the vote for the Liberal Democrats may produce a high level of turnout or vice versa, because of the successful targeting of wards achieved by this political party. The variables that measure party competition will only have the potential to be significant at the ward level, because the number of major parties, the number of candidates competing and the party share of the vote at the local authority level will all be of little importance to a potential voter in a ward election.

3.6.2: Closeness of the contest.

At the local authority level, the closeness of the contest, or marginality, is defined as, 'the number of councillors belonging to the largest group in the council in the previous election'. Our hypothesis is that the higher the proportion of seats belonging to a party in an election, the lower the level of turnout at the next election. For example, if a local authority has a council size of 70 members and 65 of them are councillors from the Labour Party, our hypothesis suggests that more people will participate in the election if the balance of the council was more equal, if Labour had 35 instead of 65 councillors. It was decided that the marginality of the previous contest should be examined, because it was believed that the past political circumstances of a local authority may affect the future behaviour of the electorate.

An inverse relationship is expected between previous marginality and turnout at both the local authority and the ward level. This is because some voters may have knowledge that the previous election was closely fought and believe that their vote may be influential in deciding the outcome of the election. A close contest may also generate more effort by political

parties to campaign and canvass the electorate and their supporters especially. This effort may encourage some people to go to the polling station who may have otherwise abstained. A final reason for high levels of turnout when there has been a close previous contest at the local authority level, is that the election may receive more media interest than usual. The media may now regard the local election as 'news-worthy' and this may promote greater participation.

The measure for marginality at the ward level is defined as the percentage lead of the winning party over the second placed party at the previous election. A scale was constructed that defined wards with a majority of less than 5% as 'very marginal'. A winning margin of between 5-10% at the previous election was a 'marginal' ward. At the other end of the scale, when a party won the previous election by between 25-35%, then the ward was classed as being 'safe'. Finally, a margin of more than 35% between the first and second placed party was regarded as a 'very safe' ward.

We expected the measure of marginality to have more of an effect at the ward level than at the local authority level since at the local authority level all the votes do not have a direct effect upon council control. It is only when the winners of the ward contests are determined that the political control of a local authority is decided. We can not, therefore, examine how close the political parties are according to the share of the vote in a local authority, as our electoral system does not uniformly translate vote share into seats on the council.

The list of political variables used in the analysis include:

CENSH	'Share of the vote for the Liberal Democrats'.
CONSH	'Share of the vote for the Conservative party'.
GREENSH	'Share of the vote for the Green party'.
INDSH	'Share of the vote for Independent candidates'.
LABSH	'Share of the vote for the Labour party'.
MAJOR	'The number of major parties in a contest (Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats)'.
MARG	'The proportion of the total number of council seats held by the largest party in the last election'.

MARGIN 'The percentage lead of the winning party over the second placed party in the last election in the ward'.
NOCOUN 'The number of councillors belonging to the largest group in the council in the previous election'.
OTHSH 'Share of the vote for the Other parties'.

3.7: Structural variables.

Variables that can be included in this category are the size of the council, the ratio of councillors to electors, the number of electors in a ward, the electoral cycle and the number of vacancies in a ward. The hypotheses for the first three variables that all measure size, is that the smaller the size, the higher the level of turnout. A couple of reasons can be given in support of this proposition. The first is that a small local authority or ward may make people feel closer to 'power'. A greater sense of community is likely to be found in a small area as people feel part of the neighbourhood, thus voting may be seen as a civic obligation. It will also be easier for the electorate to have closer contact with the council in a small area. Local issues will probably stand more chance of becoming prominent in small councils and this could generate greater interest in the election in the form of a higher level of turnout. Conversely, potential electors may feel divorced from an area if the population is large and it would also be harder to engender wide support for local issues

A small area or a low councillor to electorate ratio may make individuals feel that their vote could be more effective as it would be part of a smaller group of voters. Previous research lends support to this hypothesis. Morlan writes that, '...it is predominantly true that in these West European countries and states there is higher voter turnout in the smaller municipalities and that it progressively declines with increasing size' (1984:467). All these factors mentioned above, combine to produce an impression that it is more rational for the electorate to vote in smaller sized wards.

The electoral cycle is another structural variable that could potentially affect the level of turnout. It is expected that turnout will be higher when elections are all-out, rather than when they are held by thirds. Only having the opportunity to vote every four years, may

make the electorate believe that the elections are more important than they are if held more frequently. A quadrennial election may be seen to be like a general election. As a result, it is likely that the electorate may not treat it as a side show and ignore it. Holding elections every year may produce voter fatigue, as the electorate get turned off by the frequent opportunities to turn out at the polls. This proposition can be tested in the English district council elections, where councils have the choice of having all-out or thirds elections. We can also compare the turnout in elections to the London and metropolitan boroughs who operate different systems of electing their councillors.

Finally, the level of turnout may be dependent upon the number of vacancies in a ward. We would anticipate that turnout levels will be higher in single-member wards than in multi-member wards. The rationale for this view is that contests in single-member wards are easier for the electorate to understand. They have one vote to mark against one candidate to represent their ward. The candidate who gets the most number of votes is elected. What other method of electing a representative could be easier than this? In multi-member wards, the electorate have more votes according to the number of vacancies in the ward. They can split their votes between candidates of different parties, or not use their full allocation of votes if they so desire. The turnout may also be higher in single-member wards because the wards will by definition be smaller in electorate size than a ward represented by two or three members. Hence, it will be easier for a voter to make contact with their representative and for their councillor to make themselves known to the voter. The existence of this two-way system of benefits may produce high levels of voter participation.

The list of structural variables used in the analysis include:

COUNC	'Total number of councillors on the council'.
CRATIO	'Elector:Councillor ratio'.
ELECT	'Size of the electorate'.
NUMCAND	'The number of candidates in a contest'.
POPD	'Population density - the number of people per hectare in a local authority /ward'.
THIRDS	'Method of holding election'.
TWDS	'Total number of wards in a local authority'.

VACS 'The number of vacancies in a ward'.
WRATIO 'Elector:Ward ratio'.

3.8: Socio-economic variables.

The final set of variables that can be used to explain variations in turnout are the variables derived from the small area statistics of the 1981 and 1991 censuses. These socio-economic data have been matched with the political data-set, using the 1981 census for elections from 1978 up to 1985, and the 1991 census for elections after 1985. The election of 1986 was chosen as the cut-off year, because it is the half-way point between the two censuses. Some data have been gathered from only one census, so in the cases of the social-economic group data (SEG's) and the migration variables, these were only used as explanatory factors at the local authority level in elections after 1985, as they are drawn from the 1991 census only. Ideally, we would have new social data to match with the political data for each election, but as the census is only carried out once every ten years, some compromise was necessary. The opportunity to use socio-economic variables over a 20 year time-span is very useful. We can detect any social change that may have occurred in wards/local authorities over this time and assess any impact this had on the level of turnout.

Hypotheses need to be constructed along similar lines to the ones that were proposed using the political variables. This will enable us to test whether any of the socio-economic variables are determinants of turnout. To begin, however, it will be useful to examine the hypotheses that have been suggested by previous research using socio-economic variables to explain turnout variation. Lipset provides us with a good starting place. Table 3.1 lists the determinants of turnout which he argued are consistent across countries, over time and between national and local elections. Although a number of these social characteristics can not be perfectly replicated in our analysis, we do have some variables that can test similar hypotheses. Miller writes that Lipset's table of observations, '...provide a useful structured check-list, and it is not difficult to see how they relate to local government' (1988:71). Taking this as a lead, the next step is to suggest some of our own hypotheses to test.

Table 3.1: Lipset's table of social characteristics that are correlated with voter turnout.

Higher turnout	Lower turnout
High income	Low income
High education	High education
Occupational groups:	*Occupational groups:*
Businessmen	Unskilled workers
White-collar employees	Servants
Government employees	Service workers
Commercial crop farmers	Peasants, subsistence farmers
Whites	Negroes
Men	Women
Middle-aged people (33-55)	Young people (under 35)
Older people (over 55)	
Old residents in community	Newcomers in community
Workers in Western Europe	Workers in United States
Crisis situations	Normal situations
Married people	Single
Members of organisations	Isolated individuals

(cited in Miller, 1988:71).

The first hypothesis using census derived variables suggests that the larger the proportion of households in a local government area who are home owners, the higher the level of turnout. The hypothesis is reversed for the variable measuring the percentage of council tenants in a local government area. The conventional wisdom is that home ownership, which amounts to a significant financial stake in a society, encourages all types of political participation, including voting. Kingston *et al.* suggest from their research in the United States of America that, 'in terms of political participation, homeowners are somewhat more likely to vote than renters' (1984:131). The reasoning behind this suggestion is that active involvement in the electoral process is necessary to lend support or to voice complaints about the environment in which their investment lie. The introduction of the poll tax may be used as an example of this situation in this country. This issue caused a great political storm that resulted in high levels of turnout in the 1990 local elections. Even though the poll tax meant that the onus of local taxation was removed disproportionately from property owners and placed upon nearly all citizens, the effect of the tax was in most cases to increase the level of local taxation on property owners. The higher than average rate of turnout in 1990, could partly be due to home owners turning out to vote in opposition to the new tax.

A number of hypotheses can be suggested from our range of occupational variables. Previous research has found evidence of a relationship between occupation and voter participation. Parry *et al.*, for example, wrote that, '...the salariat (comprising managers and semi-professionals) is the most ready (category) to turn out to vote and the working class the least' (1992:127). We have the whole range of occupational data at our disposal, from the proportion of the electorate employed in professional and managerial occupations, to the percentage of people unemployed. At both the local authority and the ward level, we have variables that measure a person's Socio-Economic Group (SEG), i.e. their social class based upon occupation. This is where SEG1 includes those who work in professional occupations, SEG2 includes managerial and technical occupations, SEG3N includes those employed in skilled occupations: non-manual, SEG3M consists of those in skilled occupations: manual, SEG4 includes those in partly skilled occupations and finally, SEG5 includes unskilled occupations. We would expect to find the highest levels of turnout in local authorities that contain a large proportion of people in the SEG1 group and the lowest turnout rates in councils with a large proportion of workers in the SEG5 grouping. The basis for this belief is the extensive amount of previous research in general elections which indicates that class and occupation normally has a positive effect on the level of turnout. The higher the class and the higher the SEG (1 being the highest), the higher the level of turnout (see Lutz, 1991).

The list of socio-economic variables used in the analysis at the local authority level include:

<u>1981 Census data definitions.</u>

COUN81	'% of households in borough/district who are council tenants'.
NCWP81	'% of residents born in the new commonwealth or Pakistan'.
NOCAR81	'% of households with no access to a car'.
OWN81	'% of households in the borough/district who own their own home'
PENS81	'% of women aged 60 or over and % of men aged 65 or over'.
UNEMP81	'% of economically active males unemployed'.

1991 Census data definitions.

CENT91	'% of households with central heating'.
COUN91	'% of households in borough/district who are council tenants'.
MIGRPER	'Residents with different address one year before census'.
NOCAR91	'% of households with no access to a car'.
OVER91	'% of households with more than one person to a room'.
OWN91	'% of households in the borough/district who own their own home'.
PENS91	'% of women aged 60 or over and % of men aged 65 or over'.
SEG1	'Professional etc. occupations'.
SEG2	'Managerial and technical'.
SEG3N	'Skilled occupations -non-manual'.
SEG3M	'Skilled occupations - manual'.
SEG4	'Partly skilled occupations'.
SEG5	'Unskilled occupations'.
SELF91	'% of economically active males self-employed'.
TWOCAR91	'% of households with access to two or more cars'.
UNEMP91	'% of economically active males unemployed'.
WHITE91	'% of population self-describing ethnic type as 'white'.

The list of socio-economic variables used in the analysis at the ward level include:

AGRIC	'SEG15 - agricultural worker'.
COUNCIL	'% of households in borough/district who are council tenants'.
MANUAL	'SEG7-12, SEG14 and SEG15'.
MANUF	'% of economically active males employed in manufacturing industries'.
MIGRANTS	'Residents with different address one year before census'.
NCWP	'% of residents born in new commonwealth or Pakistan'.
NOBATH	'% of households with no bath'.
NOCAR	'% of households with no access to a car'.
NOEXWC	"% of households with no exclusive use of a toilet'.
OAP	'% of women aged 60 or over and % of men aged 65 or over'.
OVERCRO	'% of households with more than one person to a room'.
OWNOCC	'% of households in the borough/district who own their own home'.
PROFMAN	'SEG1-4 and SEG13'.
SEG1	'Professional etc. occupations'.
SEG2	'Managerial and technical'.
SEG3N	'Skilled occupations -non-manual'.
SEG3M	'Skilled occupations - manual'.
SEG4	'Partly skilled occupations'.
SEG5	'Unskilled occupations'.
SELFEMP	'% of economically active males self-employed'.
SERVICE	'% of economically active males employed in distribution and catering'.
SKILLED	'SEG8-9, SEG12 and SEG14'.
STUDENT	'% of population students aged 16 or over'.
TWOCAR	'% of households with access to two or more cars'.
UNEMP	'% of economically active males unemployed'.
YOUTH	'% of population aged 16-29'.

The brief discussion of the data-base, problems with the data, aggregate data analysis and the outlining of hypotheses to test within this thesis, brings us to the conclusion of this chapter. The scene has been set, we have indicated what we intend to do and how we intend

to do it. We are now in the position to start the analysis of turnout variation at the local authority level.

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Chapter 4: The analysis of turnout at the local authority level.

4.1: Introduction.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the variation in voter turnout in three types of local authority: the London boroughs (between 1964 and 1994), the metropolitan boroughs (between 1973 and 1994) and the shire districts (between 1973 and 1992). The election of 1979 is excluded from the analysis as the local elections were held simultaneously with the general election which artificially boosted turnout.

There are three major points of comparison that can be made with the turnout figures at the local authority level. Firstly, we can contrast the average turnout of all local authorities in every election. Secondly, we can compare the average turnout of local authorities against each other, and finally, we can examine the turnout of individual local authorities in individual years. These three points shall be examined in turn within London, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts.

4.2: Turnout variation in the London boroughs.

Data from elections held in London have been collated from 1964 to 1994. This means that we have both the figures for the turnout in the GLC (until 1986 when it was abolished), and the 32 London boroughs that make up local government in the capital. Elections in London are held for the whole council every four years, while wards vary from being single- to three- member. We have excluded the GLC from our analysis to include 32 cases in each of the nine election years - a total of 288 cases in all.

Local authorities in London are not homogeneous and the composition of London boroughs varies in a number of respects. For example, there were only 91,653 electors in Kensington and Chelsea in 1990, while Croydon had the highest number of people on the electoral

register with 244,675 for the 1986 election. There is also considerable variation in the number of wards that make up a London borough. The borough of Barking and Dagenham (between the elections of 1964 and 1974) consisted of only twelve wards, while Greenwich (from 1978 to 1994) had a total number of 36 wards. The size of council's also varies. Three boroughs, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kingston-upon-Thames and Tower Hamlets, between 1978 and 1994, had the lowest number of councillors with 50, while Ealing had the highest number of councillors with 71 (1994 election). Given that electorate size of boroughs and the number of wards and councillors differs between boroughs, this means that there is also a wide variety in the average size of the electorate in wards. Evidence from previous research shows us that, 'In London in 1986 some three-member wards had electorates of 13,233, while others had electorates of just 4,419' (Commission for Local Democracy, 1995:11).

4.2.1: Historical background to turnout rates in the London boroughs.

The first area to examine in London concerning turnout levels is to compare the average rates of turnout in each election over a 30 year period. Figure 4.1 shows that the level of voter participation in the London borough elections is positioned around the local government average of 40%. The average turnout in the London boroughs is 39% (1964-1994).

Figure 4.1: Average turnout rates in the London boroughs (1964-1994).

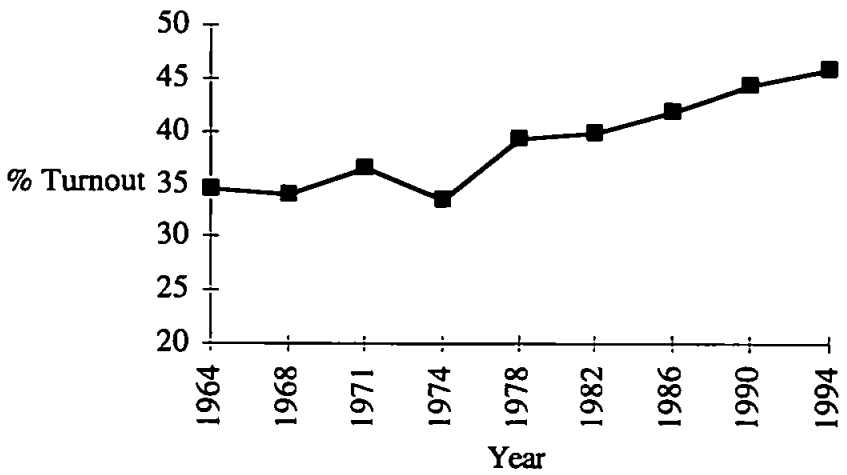


Figure 4.1 shows that the lowest rate of voter participation occurred in 1974 (33.7%), while the highest level, 46%, was produced in 1994 - a range of 12.3 percentage points. There has been a general upward trend in the turnout rate in elections to the London boroughs, particularly from 1974 onwards. If we examine the turnout rates before and after abolition of the GLC in 1986, when the local government system in London became single-tier, even though we only have three elections after abolition, they would seem to suggest that the time of abolition could be hypothesised as the turning point in the rate of turnout.

The results in Table 4.1 show that voter participation in elections between 1964 and 1982 was more than seven percentage points lower than the turnout in elections after abolition of the GLC. This may be a result of the electorate supporting the government's move to abolish what they regarded as a wasteful and unnecessary tier of government. We should be careful, however, in indicating a cause and effect relationship between abolition and turnout. Although we are able to suggest that there is a link between the variables, this may only be a spurious relationship as turnout could have risen from 1974 without the help of this intervening variable. The figure showing the level of turnout after abolition, for example,

includes the extremely high turnout that was produced in the 1990 election because of the unpopularity of the poll tax.

Table 4.1: Turnout in the London boroughs before and after the abolition of the GLC.

	Average turnout (%)
Before abolition (1964-1982)	36.4
After abolition (1986-1994)	44.1

The election of 1990 is now commonly regarded as the year of the poll tax. This issue seemed to provoke the electorate to turn out to vote in opposition to this new tax. It is very unusual for a single issue to have such an important influence, not just on the way that people vote, as Labour made massive gains in this election, but also significantly increasing the rate of turnout. Butler *et al.* wrote that,

> 'The Poll Tax affair is unique. Modern British history offers no comparable instance of a government putting a single piece of legislation so prominently in the forefront of its programme, forcefully implementing it, and then ignominiously abandoning it in the course of a single parliament' (1994:1).

The poll tax also had the effect of 'losing' people from the electoral register. Research has suggested that more than half a million people were missing from the electoral register because of the poll tax (McLean and Smith, 1995). This would have an impact on the turnout rate as this figure is calculated from the base of the number of people on the electoral register. If those people who have dropped off the register are not regular voters, then the effect of this fall in the number of eligible voters may be a rise in the level of turnout. There now appears to be some evidence that the 'missing' people are now returning. Figures compiled by a private company, GB Mailing Systems, show that in 1996 there is a record total of 44 million people eligible to vote in the general and local elections. This means that half a million people have returned to the register since 1991 (Independent on Sunday, 21/7/96).

4.2.2: Average turnout rates in the London boroughs.

When we compare the average turnout rates between individual boroughs, we will find much more variation than when we compared across election years. This section's aim is to gauge the extent of turnout variation when we compare average turnout rates in London boroughs. London is an interesting area for this type of investigation with 32 boroughs concentrated in a small geographical area, but having quite different socio-economic compositions and political histories. As the influence of geography is virtually removed, we may stand more chance of identifying the important determinants of turnout. This is contrary to what we may find when we examine the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts, because there will be more scope for spatial polarisation in these areas of local government.

Table 4.2 shows us that Richmond-upon-Thames with 50.2% had the highest average borough turnout over the 30 year period. This average turnout is just over eleven percentage points higher than the overall mean turnout figure for London. The London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Hackney were at the bottom of the turnout table with the lowest average turnout rate of 27.9%. This figure, like that for Richmond-upon-Thames at the other end of the league, is more than eleven percentage points away from the overall mean. More than 22 percentage points separates the average turnout figures of those boroughs in London at the top and bottom of the average turnout table.

Not only does Table 4.2 show that there is a great amount of variation between the top and bottom boroughs regarding their average turnout rates, but there are a number of other boroughs whose average levels of turnout are considerably away from the average turnout rate for London. Over the 30 year period between the first and last elections in our data-set, there are three boroughs (Richmond-upon-Thames, Sutton and Hillingdon), which all have an overall average turnout fifteen percentage points greater than the average turnout figure for the whole of London over the time period. Conversely, there are seven boroughs which

have average turnouts over the time period fifteen percentage points below the mean figure. Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Southwark, Kensington and Chelsea and Islington are the 'deviant' boroughs in this case.

Table 4.2: List of London boroughs in descending order of their average rate of turnout (1964-1994).

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	S.d
Richmond-upon-Thames	50.2	40.7	56.5	6.2
Sutton	45.6	37.9	52.4	4.8
Hillingdon	45.2	40.8	50.7	4.0
Kingston-upon-Thames	44.7	38.7	53.0	5.3
Bromley	44.5	41.3	47.5	2.2
Bexley	44.3	39.3	47.5	2.7
Harrow	43.9	39.7	47.7	2.8
Ealing	43.6	38.3	48.6	2.9
Merton	43.6	37.8	51.5	4.7
Hounslow	43.2	36.1	45.5	2.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	43.1	31.4	49.5	5.8
Wandsworth	41.8	33.0	52.6	7.4
Greenwich	41.5	33.6	49.3	5.6
Enfield	41.4	37.0	45.5	2.6
Barnet	41.3	35.1	46.4	4.2
Havering	40.9	36.6	46.3	3.1
Brent	39.6	33.2	47.7	4.5
Redbridge	39.4	33.6	47.4	4.8
Camden	39.3	33.3	45.0	4.4
Croydon	38.8	34.8	45.3	3.3
Haringey	38.4	28.9	46.2	6.1
Waltham Forest	37.9	29.2	46.4	5.5
Lewisham	37.5	33.6	40.8	3.0
Lambeth	35.6	25.7	43.0	6.7
Westminster	34.6	25.7	48.7	7.5
Islington	32.5	16.1	44.8	10.4
Kensington and Chelsea	30.7	22.4	38.6	6.2
Southwark	29.3	20.7	36.7	6.2
Barking and Dagenham	28.6	21.8	36.6	4.7
Newham	28.1	19.9	37.2	5.2
Hackney	27.9	15.5	38.5	7.3
Tower Hamlets	27.9	11.9	53.7	14.0

The next logical step in the analysis would be to examine those boroughs that are furthest away from the mean, to see if there are any obvious reasons behind their special behaviour. For example, of the seven London boroughs cited above that had especially low levels of turnout (more than fifteen percentage points below the average turnout figure for London), four of these boroughs have been controlled by the same party throughout their history. In the boroughs of Newham, Barking and Dagenham and Southwark, Labour have always

been in overall control between 1964 and 1994, while the Conservatives have always been in power in Kensington and Chelsea over the same period. These results suggest that low levels of turnout could be dependent upon the previous history and strength of party control in a London borough. To lend greater support to this argument, the boroughs at the other end of the turnout scale indicate on the whole close two-party contests. Two good examples of such boroughs are Richmond-upon-Thames and Sutton.

In Richmond-upon-Thames, the Conservatives have won five of the nine elections since 1964, but the political situation has changed gradually but significantly over time. From 1964 to 1982, the Conservatives were in control of the borough and in a relatively strong position. In 1982, there was a very close two-party contest at the borough level with a challenge to the Conservatives coming from the Alliance. This resulted in the borough coming under no overall control. The Alliance (and from the election of 1990 onwards, the Liberal Democrats) have significantly improved their position in the borough since then. The 1986 election was won convincingly by the Alliance, and in the two elections since, 1990 and 1994, the Liberal Democrats have won control of the council. This political state of affairs in the borough is one in which there is a high level of party competition in every election. The borough of Richmond-upon-Thames now has a reputation in London as a stronghold for the 'community politics' of the Liberal Democrats. Perhaps the more visible role of the local authority under the Liberal Democrat control may have influenced the level of turnout at the polls.

The political history of Sutton is similar to that of Richmond-upon-Thames. The Conservatives were in control of this borough between 1964 and 1986. Sutton was under no overall control in 1986 with the Alliance as the largest party, and by 1990, the Liberal Democrats had a council majority of eight seats. At the 1994 election, this majority grew to 38 seats. It seems, therefore, that in Sutton, as in Richmond-upon-Thames, the rise of the Liberal Democrats may have had a direct impact on increasing the level of voter participation.

Although it is simplistic, it seems as if there is a relationship between the level of turnout and the political history of a London borough. The two high turnout boroughs show evidence of close political competition for control, while the two boroughs at the bottom of Table 4.2, Tower Hamlets and Hackney, are generally Labour boroughs. Tower Hamlets has been under Labour control for six terms of office, between 1964 and 1986 and from 1994 onwards. The Alliance/Liberal Democrats won control of the borough in 1986 and 1990. From a social context Waller writes that, 'the London borough of Tower Hamlets encompasses the inner East End, the traditional working-class communities beyond the Tower of London' (1991:105). In Hackney, Labour have won control of the borough in every election apart from 1968 when the Conservatives won the most number of wards. Hackney is described by Waller as, '...a poor borough of mixed race and high unemployment, facing some of London's worst inner urban problems' (1991:64). When the political histories and social background of these two boroughs are investigated, the low levels of turnout are not particularly surprising.

Another area to examine within this section are the boroughs which have increased their average turnout rates over time for some reason or another. We have previously mentioned that the turnout in the election of 1990 was unusually high. We have the relevant time-series data available, so it is possible to compare and contrast the situation of some boroughs before and after the imposition of the poll tax, to see if this factor influenced the level of voter participation. The best example of a borough whose rate of turnout seemed to have been affected by the poll tax is Westminster. The turnout in this borough was languishing in the range of the low 30 per cent mark through the previous three decades. In 1990, however, 48.7% of the electorate voted in the election. It is suggested that this level of turnout is directly related to the low rate of poll tax set in the borough.

A similarly important increase in the proportion of people voting could also be detected in Tower Hamlets in 1986. The average level of voter participation in the borough was just under 20% before 1986, but in 1986 the turnout was 30.6%. The result of the election was

the Alliance winning control of the borough from the Labour party. This was the first time that the borough was not under the control of the Labour party. On obtaining power, the Alliance, '...divided the area into seven units under teams of bureaucrats and councillors in order to promote community access' (Kingdom, 1991b:107). It seems reasonable to propose that the local campaigning of the Liberal Democrats which includes their Focus newsletters, and the intensity of the local party competition produced greater interest than normal in this particular local election.

4.2.3: 'Deviant' turnout rates in the London boroughs.

The final important point of comparison when examining the turnout figures in the London boroughs is to focus upon the figures when they are not aggregated up to form an average. When we delve into the participation rates of a single local authority at any given time, we can see that turnout variation is, as intuition and statistical procedure would expect, much greater than the range of figures when we compared turnout figures in every election year.

London provides us with an example of turnout remaining at a steady level over time, but it is interesting to note that there is a wide range both in the minimum and maximum turnout figures within individual boroughs. The lowest turnout of 11.9% occurred in Tower Hamlets in 1968, while Bromley was the borough that had the highest minimum turnout figure of 41.3% in 1974. The maximum turnout rates are dispersed between 36.6% in Barking and Dagenham in 1994, to a high of 56.5% in Richmond-upon-Thames in 1990. Overall, there is a margin of 19.9 percentage points between the maximum turnout figures of the London boroughs, compared to a range of 29.4 percentage points between the minimum turnout values. There is less variation with the higher turnout rates, as they peak at roughly the same level. What these figures show is that averaging turnout rates can hide significant amounts of variation.

Not only is there variation in turnout rates within London, there is also evidence to suggest that it is the same boroughs that produce high or low levels of turnout over time. We examined the turnout rates of boroughs relative to each other in every election, and gave them a position in the league of turnout rates in London (see Appendix 2). We then counted the number of appearances a borough made in the top or bottom ten according to their turnout in each of the nine elections. Table 4.3 shows that 20 boroughs appeared at least once in the top ten turnout rates in an election. Richmond-upon-Thames appeared at the top of the appearances league, as this borough produced a level of turnout that placed it in the top ten rates of turnout in every election. There are another eight boroughs that appear more than five times at the top end of the turnout scale. While it seems that there is some consistency to the boroughs that appear in the league of turnout rates, there are also four boroughs (Enfield, Haringey, Tower Hamlets and Westminster) that only appear on one occasion. What reasons can be suggested for this 'one-off' behaviour?

The London borough of Westminster in 1990 is an example of a borough that has a special local event or issue that increased its turnout on just one occasion. We have previously mentioned that this local issue was the low level of poll tax set in the borough. The high level of turnout in Tower Hamlets in 1994 can be put down to the contestation of the BNP and their 1993 by-election win. The appearance of Haringey in 1986 amongst the boroughs with the ten highest rates of turnout is believed to be due to the effort to improve the accuracy of the electoral register. For two years up to the election in 1986, the 'deadwood' was removed from the register and registration campaigns added around 9,000 new voters in 1984 and between 5-6,000 extra voters in 1985. This meant that the turnout figure in this borough in 1986 was thought to be based upon an accurate electorate figure for the first time in ten years. Finally, in Enfield in 1968, it is suggested that the political change that occurred in the borough is the likely explanation for the especially high rate of turnout. In 1964, Labour had 41 councillors to the Conservatives 29. Four years later, the situation was completely reversed. The Conservatives now had 54 councillors to only fourteen from the Labour party. While the average turnout in the London boroughs fell between 1964 and

1968, the increase in turnout in Enfield meant that this borough moved up the league of turnout rates relative to the other boroughs in the 1968 election.

Table 4.3: The number of times a London borough appears in the top ten borough turnout rates between 1964 and 1994 (nine elections).

Borough	Number of appearances in the top ten	Political control of borough (terms of office)
Richmond-upon-Thames	9	Con (5) Lib Dem (3) NOC (1)
Ealing	7	Lab (5) Con (4)
Harrow	7	Con (7) NOC (2)
Hillingdon	7	Con (4) Lab (4) NOC (1)
Kingston-upon-Thames	7	Con (6) NOC (2) Lib Dem (1)
Merton	7	Con (4) Lab (4) NOC (1)
Sutton	7	Con (6) Lib Dem (2) NOC (1)
Bromley	6	Con (9)
Hammersmith and Fulham	6	Lab (6) NOC (2) Con (1)
Bexley	5	Con (6) Lab(2) NOC (1)
Hounslow	5	Lab (8) Con (1)
Wandsworth	4	Con (6) Lab (3)
Greenwich	3	Lab (8) Con (1)
Barnet	2	Con (8) NOC (1)
Brent	2	Lab (5) NOC (3) Con (1)
Havering	2	NOC (4) Con (3) Lab (2)
Enfield	1	Con (7) Lab (2)
Haringey	1	Lab (8) Con (1)
Tower Hamlets	1	Lab (7) Lib Dem (2)
Westminster	1	Con (9)

(Where the Alliance have won control of a borough, their term(s) of office have been grouped together with the Liberal Democrats).

From a geographical perspective, the results in Table 4.3 show that the boroughs which appear more than five times come equally from north and south of the river Thames. They also tend to be geographically proximate. For example, Harrow, Hillingdon and Ealing are all neighbouring boroughs, and Hammersmith and Fulham also shares boundaries with Ealing. The political histories of those boroughs that consistently produce high levels of turnout over time, show similar patterns of results. Apart from the boroughs of Bromley and Westminster that have been controlled by the Conservatives over the whole period of 1964 to 1994, all the other boroughs have been controlled by a mixture of political parties and/or have had periods of being under no overall control. Merton, for example, has been

controlled by the Conservatives on four occasions, the Labour party has been in power four times, and there has been one term of office when the borough was under no overall control. Overall, the uncertainty as to which party will win overall control of a borough appears to be an important determinant of turnout. Following this line of reasoning, we would expect to find the low turnout boroughs to be dominated by one political party throughout their history.

The situation at the bottom end of the range of turnout levels is similar to that of the boroughs with high levels of turnout, in the way that the same boroughs are consistently producing rates of turnout that put them lower than other London boroughs. Table 4.4 shows that sixteen boroughs make an appearance in the bottom ten turnout tables in at least one election, and there are five boroughs that produce rates of turnout that are among the ten lowest rates in every election in the study. Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Kensington and Chelsea, Newham and Southwark are the boroughs that consistently produce poor rates of turnout relative to the other London boroughs. There are two instances of boroughs falling into the bottom ten in only one election: Brent in 1990 and Croydon in 1986. There seems to be no special reasons for this behaviour. The boroughs made their appearances in the bottom ten with relatively high turnout rates of 39.1% and 39.5% respectively. This indicates that the turnout in these boroughs in the elections of 1986 and 1990 has not increased by the same rate as other boroughs in these two elections.

Of the boroughs in Table 4.4 which appear more than five times in the bottom ten, only Southwark and Lambeth are located south of the river Thames. The other seven boroughs are grouped together geographically north of the Thames. Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster are neighbouring boroughs, while Islington, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Barking and Dagenham are located in a line west to east across London. The political background of all the boroughs that make an appearance in the bottom ten in an election, shows us that five boroughs have been under the control of only one party for the

last 30 years. This result was not very surprising, because it is in line with the belief that the low turnout boroughs will be those that are politically safe for one of the major parties.

What is surprising, however, is to find three instances of safe Conservative boroughs, one that produces constantly high levels of turnout (Table 4.3: Bromley, six appearances in the top ten), and two that consistently produce a relatively low level of turnout (Table 4.4: Kensington and Chelsea, nine appearances in the bottom ten and Westminster, seven appearances in the bottom ten). This finding illustrates that to understand why turnout varies between boroughs in London, we need to examine much more than the political histories of the boroughs. The socio-economic composition of the boroughs, and where the boroughs are located could also be important factors. This means that in this case, although the political make-up of Bromley, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster are similar, Bromley is a large borough on the outskirts of London, while Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster are relatively small boroughs situated in the heart of London.

Table 4.4: The number of times a London borough appears in the bottom ten borough turnout rates between 1964 and 1994 (nine elections).

Borough	Number of appearances in the bottom ten	Political control of borough (terms of office)
Barking and Dagenham	9	Lab (9)
Hackney	9	Lab (8) Con (1)
Kensington and Chelsea	9	Con (9)
Newham	9	Lab (9)
Southwark	9	Lab (9)
Islington	8	Lab (8) Con (1)
Tower Hamlets	7	Lab (7) Lib Dem (2)
Westminster	7	Con (9)
Lambeth	6	Lab (6) NOC (2) Con (1)
Waltham Forest	5	Lab (6) NOC (2) Con (1)
Haringey	3	Lab (8) Con (1)
Lewisham	3	Lab (8) Con (1)
Barnet	2	Con (8) NOC (1)
Redbridge	2	Con (8) NOC (1)
Brent	1	Lab (5) NOC (3) Con (1)
Croydon	1	Con (7) Lab (1) NOC (1)

(Where the Alliance have won control of a borough, their term(s) of office have been grouped together with the Liberal Democrats).

When the tables showing the boroughs with the top and bottom rates of turnout are compared, we can see that there is some consistency to the boroughs that appear at the ends of the turnout scale over time. It is possible, however, for a borough to produce a rate of turnout that puts it amongst the top ten turnout figures in one election, but then for the borough to appear in the bottom ten average turnout rates in another election. As there are only 32 London boroughs, a borough can break away from the middle ground and appear in both the top and bottom ten turnout boroughs over time. There are five boroughs that appear in both Tables 4.4 and 4.5. Westminster had seven appearances in the bottom ten (1964, 1968, 1971, 1978, 1982, 1986 and 1994) and one appearance in the top ten in 1990. Barnet had two top ten appearances in 1964 and 1968 and also two appearances in the bottom ten in 1971 and 1986. Brent, with two appearances in the top ten in 1978 and 1994 and one in the bottom ten in 1990, Haringey one top (1986) and three bottoms (1968, 1974 and 1990), and Tower Hamlets with one top ten appearance in 1994 and seven rates of turnout that placed it in the bottom ten (1964, 1968, 1971, 1974, 1978, 1982 and 1986) were the four other boroughs that were 'deviant'.

To conclude, we can say that there is evidence to suggest that most London boroughs remain in a similar position in the league of turnout rates over time. Once a borough has a high or low level of turnout, it is unlikely that they will radically change this level of turnout over time, although it is possible. When turnout is relatively consistent from one election to another, Bingham Powell Jr. writes that, 'This indicates that stable features of the political situation are having powerful aggregate effects on the outcomes of millions of individual citizens voting decisions' (1982:112). Table 4.5 shows that there is further proof that individual London boroughs will keep their turnout at a steady level over time, because there are near perfect correlations between sets of elections that are close together. For example, a .93 correlation was found between the elections in 1964 and 1968, and again between 1978 and 1982. We can conclude, therefore, that the turnout in the last election is a very good guide to what the level of turnout will be in the next election. The correlations generally

become weaker when the elections are further apart. The lowest statistical relationship was found between the London elections of 1968 and 1994 with a coefficient of .37.

Table 4.5: A correlation matrix between elections in the London boroughs (1964-1994).

Year	1964	1968	1971	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994
1964	1								
1968	.93	1							
1971	.79	.91	1						
1974	.88	.88	.81	1					
1978	.81	.86	.87	.91	1				
1982	.76	.79	.81	.90	.93	1			
1986	.54	.62	.74	.73	.80	.89	1		
1990	.61	.61	.65	.77	.74	.82	.81	1	
1994	.44	.37	.44	.50	.53	.65	.63	.78	1

4.3: Turnout variation in the metropolitan boroughs.

The data collected on elections to the metropolitan boroughs starts in 1973. This is a significant date to start our analysis because it is a year after the Local Government Act, and thus the date of the first elections for the new local authorities. Elections in the metropolitan boroughs are held for one third of the seats on an annual basis. All wards have three members and, therefore, all have elections each year. A councillor's term is for four years because one year is fallow. There are 36 boroughs and fifteen elections in this study. The data-set covers elections up to and including the 1994 election. This means that there are a total of 540 cases in the data-set.

As we found in the London boroughs, there is also a wide range in how the metropolitan boroughs are composed. The boroughs in this data-set range significantly in electorate size from Knowsley with 110,396 registered people for the 1994 election, to a high of 773,051 on Birmingham's electoral register in 1992. The metropolitan boroughs also vary according to the number of wards that make up each borough. Knowsley, between the years of 1973 and 1980, and St. Helens (1973-1978) had the smallest number of wards over the time

period with fourteen, while Birmingham (1973-1980) had the most number of wards with a total of 42. This figure falls in Birmingham to 39 wards from the election of 1982 onwards.

Another variable that also has a considerable range between metropolitan boroughs and has the potential to be an important determinant of turnout, are the number of councillors in a local authority. This variable is smallest in St. Helens in elections between 1973 and 1978 when they had only 45 councillors, while Birmingham had 126 councillors between 1973 and 1980.

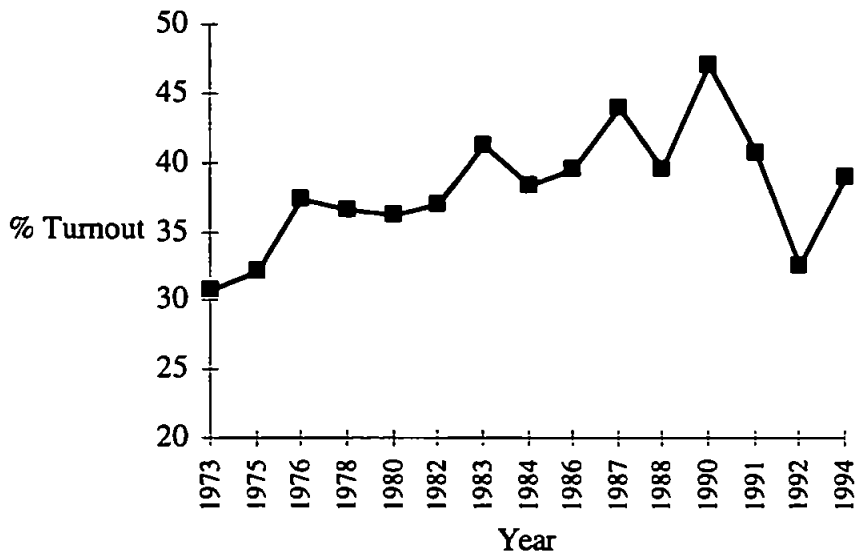
4.3.1: Historical background to turnout rates in the metropolitan boroughs.

Figure 4.2 illustrates that the average turnout rate in the metropolitan boroughs is located around the expected mean of 40%. The average turnout in all the elections between 1972 and 1994 was 38.2%, which compares to the figure of 39% found for the London boroughs. There is quite a wide range in the turnout figures between elections. The lowest average turnout in an election occurred in 1973 with a figure of 30.8% while the highest turnout of 47.1% occurred in 1990. This provides a range of 16.3 percentage points between the highest and lowest figures.

There has been a small but gradual increase in the rate of turnout in the metropolitan boroughs over the period in this study, with the late 1980s providing the greatest increase. Participation was especially high, defined in this case as over 40%, in the years of 1983, 1987, 1990 and 1991. The 1990 election was the pinnacle year for voter participation in the metropolitan boroughs. The expected gradual increase in participation, however, has not progressed beyond the 1990 election. In 1992, the percentage of the electorate participating in the election plummeted to 32.5%. Perhaps this low rate of turnout may be the result of the electorate suffering from voter fatigue as the general election was held just four weeks earlier. In 1994, the turnout picked up again to 38.9%, but was still not as high as in previous years.

The variance in the rate of voter participation between the election years seems to be quite wide. Hypothetically, a large number of factors can be suggested to explain this situation. These include public opinion on the current salient national issues and the overall national political temperature. There may also be important national events that can be put forward to account for these high turnout rates in the highlighted years. Finally, as the elections to the metropolitan boroughs are held annually, there are many more cases in this data-set than there are in London, giving more scope for variation in turnout levels.

Figure 4.2: Average turnout rates in the metropolitan boroughs (1973-1994).



What is so striking about the years when voter participation was especially high is that 1983 and 1987 were general election years. As local elections are held in May, it has been suggested that these elections were used as mock general elections, so that the Prime Minister could make a decision as to the timing of the next national election. The election of 1991 can be seen in a similar light, because the electorate could have expected a general election to be imminent. The decision was taken, however, to extend the term of parliament to its maximum length of five years to 1992.

Another factor that seems to be important in determining the differential in turnout levels over time, is the effect of abolition of the metropolitan county councils. Following the White Paper entitled: 'Streamlining the Cities' (1983), and prolonged debate and opposition to the government's proposals from a large proportion of those who worked in local government, the 1985 Local Government Act abolished these councils. Table 4.6 shows that there has been a higher turnout (by three percentage points) in elections since abolition in 1985.

Table 4.6: Turnout in the metropolitan boroughs before and after the abolition of the metropolitan county councils.

	Average turnout (%)
Before abolition (1973-1984)	39.2
After abolition (1986-1992)	42.2

The government argued that in eliminating the upper tier of the metropolitan authorities, they removed inter-tier conflicts, reduced costs, increased efficiency, made the system of administration clearer and brought the services closer to the people by distributing their functions to the borough councils. The expenditure from the counties, however, was not all directly passed on to the boroughs, but placed in the hands of a number of ad-hoc joint boards or 'quangos' as they are now known. The electorate may have reacted to what they perceived to be a positive change by central government and turned out to vote because the system was new and a vote in a single-tier local authority was now their only chance to vote. Of course, the higher rates of turnout after abolition, may be the result of a set of entirely unrelated factors. For example, the figures after abolition include the election of 1990 when turnout was very high because of the poll tax.

4.3.2: Average turnout rates in the metropolitan boroughs.

The second point of comparison in examining the general levels of turnout in the metropolitan boroughs, is to analyse the average turnout rates in each individual borough.

Figure 4.2 has shown that the average turnout in these elections are scattered near the mean of 40%, but this hides the wide variation that exists between boroughs. Table 4.7 shows that Stockport has the highest average borough turnout over the time period with a figure of 46.0%. This level of voter participation is nearly eight percentage points higher than the average turnout figure for the metropolitan boroughs over the same time. The high level of turnout in Stockport contrasts with the average rate of turnout in Sunderland which has the lowest average turnout of 31.5% - nearly seven percentage points lower than the mean metropolitan turnout figure. More than fourteen percentage points separates the average turnout figures of the best and worst performing boroughs in respect of their turnout rates.

Table 4.7 shows that there are a number of metropolitan boroughs whose average rate of turnout is some distance away from the average turnout figure for the metropolitan boroughs over the fifteen elections. There are two boroughs which have an average turnout rate fifteen percentage points greater than the overall mean of 38.2% - Stockport and Bury. Similarly, there are two boroughs whose average turnout rates are fifteen percentage points below the average. Sunderland and Knowsley are the boroughs that have average rates of turnout below these limits.

Table 4.7: List of metropolitan boroughs in descending order of their average rate of turnout (1973-1994).

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	S.d
Stockport	46.0	40.8	54.1	4.6
Bury	44.6	36.5	57.3	5.3
Trafford	44.1	37.0	56.4	4.9
Calderdale	42.3	37.9	51.6	4.0
Wirral	41.6	33.1	52.2	5.7
Kirklees	41.5	30.4	51.6	5.2
Bradford	41.1	33.7	55.9	5.9
Rochdale	41.1	32.1	50.1	5.0
Wolverhampton	40.5	24.3	51.9	7.0
Bolton	40.3	33.9	53.3	5.0
North Tyneside	39.8	32.3	50.0	5.2
Walsall	39.5	29.2	47.6	5.5
Leeds	38.8	30.2	50.6	5.4
Oldham	38.5	31.3	43.8	3.8
Sefton	38.3	30.8	48.5	5.2
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	38.2	29.3	45.8	5.2
Birmingham	38.1	28.2	45.8	5.0

Table 4.7: cont:

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	S.d
Solihull	38.0	30.5	49.5	5.3
Liverpool	37.9	25.7	50.0	7.8
Manchester	37.9	27.6	46.4	5.6
Coventry	37.8	29.5	43.4	3.8
Doncaster	37.1	26.8	41.6	3.8
Tameside	37.1	30.2	42.7	4.0
Wakefield	37.0	27.1	45.3	5.1
South Tyneside	36.6	26.2	49.0	5.2
Dudley	36.5	29.7	46.5	4.6
Salford	36.5	25.0	43.2	5.2
Barnsley	35.9	24.4	40.3	4.3
Sheffield	35.9	25.2	45.6	5.7
Gateshead	35.6	28.5	43.5	4.4
St. Helens	35.5	24.2	43.5	6.0
Rotherham	34.0	23.6	43.6	5.3
Wigan	33.8	23.6	40.8	4.5
Sandwell	32.9	22.9	46.0	6.1
Knowsley	32.4	21.5	45.1	6.6
Sunderland	31.5	21.6	41.2	5.2

The levels of voter participation in Stockport has always been high, with a range between 40.8% in 1973 and 54.1% in 1990. Turnout has been gradually rising over time in this borough, with the exception of 1990 when the turnout was exceptionally high and in 1992 when the turnout was lower than average for the borough, but still high relative to the other metropolitan boroughs. The range of turnout in Sunderland has always been correspondingly low. Only 21.6% of the electorate voted in 1992 while the highest borough turnout of 41.2% was achieved in 1990. The turnout in Sunderland has been fluctuating over time with the same blips in 1990 and 1992 as we found in Stockport. There is no simple explanation for this wide disparity between the two boroughs at the extreme ends of the turnout table. There is therefore a need for some further statistical analysis and qualitative research so that these results can be fully explained.

If we narrow the focus to a single local authority or even further still to the ward level, we may be able to explain the reasons for the 'deviant' rate of turnout received. For example, in 1980, Bolton had a turnout five percentage points higher than their average turnout from 1973 up to this date. A possible reason for this increase could be that a full council election was held in 1980 as the local authority was re-warded. Perhaps, the electorate were more

aware that an election was taking place due to the extra publicity surrounding the contests, and also decided to participate because they saw the election as being more important than usual. Without examining each local authority separately, important local factors like this one may be overlooked.

The next step in the analysis of the average turnout rates among the metropolitan authorities was to examine the political histories of those boroughs at the top of the table. The political situation in Stockport seems to be highly charged. The last time the borough was held by a single party was in 1982 when the Conservatives were in control. Between 1983 and 1994, Stockport was under no overall control with all three major parties in close competition. It is thought that this party competition may be a factor influencing the level of turnout in this borough. The political history of Bury shows that since 1973, there have been three elections in which no party has won overall control (1973, 1992 and 1994). In all the other years, the Conservatives have been in 'power' seven times and Labour for five terms. Like Stockport, the political make-up of the borough over time suggests that it is a marginal local authority.

If we examine those boroughs with the lowest average rates of turnout, we would hypothesise that one party would dominate the council in all elections. Over the 21 year period of the study, Labour have always controlled Sunderland and Knowsley. The closest that any party has come to taking over political control is to limit Labour to a 20 (1976) and a 21 (1976) seat overall majority respectively. It seems that our initial impression has been confirmed but we will only be able to prove this later with the backing of statistical results. Indeed, there are examples of local authorities that are dominated by one party but still have a high level of turnout. The borough of Kirklees has been under Labour control since 1990, yet continues to have higher than average rates of turnout. What can be said at this early stage of analysis, is that there are likely to be a multitude of reasons to explain why turnout varies, but party competition may be one of the influential variables.

Another potential determinant of turnout is the socio-economic make-up and geographical location of the areas in question. Sunderland and its surrounding area of Wearside is one of the most depressed industrial areas in Britain. The decline of the city's core industries of shipbuilding and coal has resulted in high levels of unemployment. Perhaps, it is not too surprising that Labour dominates the political scene and the level of turnout is low. Similar background information can be found in support of our argument in Knowsley. Waller writes that (Knowsley's), 'predominantly political characteristics are those associated with council estates on the edge of the Liverpool conurbation ...- the sorts of places to which inner-city dwellers were decanted in the slum clearance of the 1950s' (1991:147). This discussion shows that both the political histories and the socio-economic make up of a local authority should be examined in an attempt to explain turnout variation.

4.3.3: 'Deviant' turnout rates in the metropolitan boroughs.

The final section of the analysis into turnout in the metropolitan boroughs focuses upon the turnout of individual boroughs in individual elections. Table 4.7 shows that the minimum turnout figures in the metropolitan boroughs vary between 21.5% in Knowsley (1975) to 40.8% in Stockport (1973). This provides a range of 19.3 percentage points between these two figures. The maximum figures in the metropolitan boroughs show a similar amount of variation. Barnsley had the lowest maximum figure of 40.3% in 1987, which compares to 57.3% of the electorate in Bury which voted in the 1990 election. There is a range of seventeen percentage points between these maximum turnout figures. The extent of turnout variation in metropolitan boroughs over time requires some explanation. If we only analysed the average rates of voter participation in a borough over a series of elections, we would overlook a very high or low turnout rate that may have occurred. We may find that a local issue or a heightened intensity surrounding a political contest could be the reason for an exceptionally high turnout figure. This finding would provide some support for the hypothesis which proposes that local elections do have some local aspect to them, and are not just 'annual general elections'. The exceptionally high turnout of 55.9% in Bradford in

1990 provides us with a good example of this situation. Between 1973 and 1994, the average turnout in Bradford was just over 41% - nearly fifteen percentage points less than the figure produced in 1990. Bradford set the lowest poll tax of all the metropolitan boroughs in 1990, so like Westminster in the same year, this low level of taxation plus the media interest looks to have caused the high rate of turnout. Bradford was dubbed at the time to be the 'Westminster of the North'.

In order to investigate the 'deviant' turnout rates in the metropolitan boroughs, we ranked the boroughs in every election according to their turnout rate (see Appendix 3) and then tallied the number of times a borough appeared in either the bottom or the top ten. This will allow us to identify whether it is the same boroughs that are appearing repeatedly at the top or the bottom end of the turnout table. The results in Table 4.8 show that 26 boroughs appear at least once in the tables of boroughs with top ten turnout rates over the fifteen elections in the study. This high number of boroughs is not particularly surprising, because a singular event can propel a borough up the turnout table, only for the local authority to fall back to its 'natural' position at the next election. There were seven boroughs that appeared only once in the lists of boroughs with high levels of turnout. Six of these boroughs made appearances in the top ten with a turnout rate only slightly higher than their average rate of voter participation. This suggests that turnout in these boroughs just increased relative to other boroughs in this one election and there are no special factors at play. The one exception is Leeds which has an average turnout of 38.8% in our study, but produced a turnout of 50.6% in 1990. As the level of turnout was especially high across the whole of local government in this election, this turnout figure in Leeds only put it tenth in the table in this election, and can probably be explained by the introduction of the poll tax.

What is more interesting is that the same boroughs appear a number of times at the top end of the table. Bury and Stockport produce a level of turnout that puts them amongst the top ten turnout rates in every election. Similarly consistent at the top of the table are Trafford with fourteen appearances and Calderdale and Kirklees with thirteen appearances each. A

total of eleven boroughs appear in the top ten in more than five elections. There is also evidence of change over time, with some boroughs not appearing in the top ten at all until a certain date, and then appearing consistently thereafter. Wolverhampton is a good example of such a borough, as it appears in the top ten in every election after 1986 only. Officials from this borough were interviewed but unfortunately they were unable to suggest any reasons for the improvement in their turnout rate since 1986.

Table 4.8: The number of times a metropolitan borough appears in the top ten borough turnout rates between 1973 and 1994 (fifteen elections).

Borough	Number of appearances in the top ten	Political control of borough (terms of office)
Bury	15	Con (7) Lab (5) NOC (3)
Stockport	15	NOC (10) Con (5)
Trafford	14	Con (13) NOC (2)
Calderdale	13	Con (8) NOC (7)
Kirklees	13	Lab (8) NOC (5) Con (2)
Wirral	11	Con (7) NOC (7) Lab (1)
Bradford	10	Lab (7) Con (4) NOC (4)
Wolverhampton	7	Lab (12) NOC (3)
North Tyneside	6	Lab (14) Con (1)
Rochdale	6	Lab (7) NOC (6) Con (2)
Solihull	6	Con (12) NOC (3)
Bolton	4	Lab (11) Con (4)
Coventry	4	Lab (14) Con (1)
Liverpool	4	NOC (8) Lab (7)
Walsall	4	NOC (9) Lab (6)
Doncaster	3	Lab (15)
South Tyneside	3	Lab (14) NOC (1)
Birmingham	2	Lab (10) Con (4) NOC (1)
Manchester	2	Lab (15)
Leeds	1	Lab (11) NOC (2) Con (2)
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1	Lab (15)
Oldham	1	Lab (12) NOC (2) Con (1)
Salford	1	Lab (7) NOC (6) Con (2)
Sefton	1	Con (8) NOC (7)
St. Helens	1	Lab (15)
Tameside	1	Lab (13) Con (2)

(The election of 1979 and hence the term of office resulting from this election has been excluded from the analysis).

The examination of the metropolitan boroughs that appeared in the top ten on more than five occasions shows that seven out of the eleven boroughs come from Greater Manchester (four boroughs) and West Yorkshire (three boroughs). Not only are the boroughs that appear most frequently grouped together geographically, but their political histories show similarities with no one party being dominant in a borough over the time period. Of all the boroughs that appear in Table 4.8, only Doncaster, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and St. Helens have been controlled by the same party over the 21 year period. The other metropolitan boroughs have had varieties of political control. For example, the Wirral has been controlled by the Conservatives on seven occasions, Labour has been in power for one term and seven elections have resulted in a hung council. It looks as if the uncertainty over which party will be in control of the borough could be a contributory factor in deciding the high level of turnout in some metropolitan authorities.

The next area to analyse in this section is to see if similar patterns exist in those metropolitan boroughs which appear in the list of the bottom ten boroughs a number of times. Table 4.9 shows that a total of 24 boroughs appear in the list of those boroughs with the lowest ten turnout rates in an election. As was the case with the metropolitan boroughs with high rates of turnout, there were some boroughs that appeared only once. Wirral had a level of turnout that placed it in the bottom ten in 1978 and Newcastle-upon-Tyne appeared in 1990 only. There is some consistency to the boroughs that appear at the bottom end of the turnout scale. Knowsley, Sunderland and Wigan appear fourteen times out of fifteen elections, while Sandwell (twelve) and Rotherham (eleven) also appear in nearly every election. Twelve boroughs in Table 4.9 had more than five appearances in the bottom ten.

Our analysis of the boroughs that appeared the most number of times in the top ten borough turnout rates (Table 4.8), found that they were mainly concentrated within two of the old metropolitan county councils of Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. This pattern was continued with the boroughs which appear most frequently in Table 4.9. Out of the twelve boroughs that appear in the bottom ten more than five times, seven of them are from either

South Yorkshire (four boroughs) or Greater Manchester (three boroughs). This means that the old metropolitan county council of Greater Manchester provides four boroughs that produce consistently high turnout rates (five or more appearances in the top ten) as well as three boroughs that have low turnout rates in more than five elections.

The political background of the boroughs in Table 4.9 show that half of the metropolitan boroughs in the table have been under the complete control of the Labour party for the 21 years of our data-set (1973-1994). In Table 4.8, only four metropolitan boroughs were always controlled by the Labour party. This would seem to suggest that there is a relationship between the dominance of a borough by the Labour party and low levels of turnout. Before we go on to test possible hypotheses to determine why turnout is high or low in some areas, we must keep in mind the results that seven out of the top eight boroughs that consistently produce low levels of turnout are 'safe' Labour boroughs.

Table 4.9: The number of times a metropolitan borough appears in the bottom ten borough turnout rates between 1973 and 1994 (fifteen elections).

Borough	Number of appearances in the bottom ten	Political control of borough (terms of office)
Knowsley	14	Lab (15)
Sunderland	14	Lab (15)
Wigan	14	Lab (15)
Sandwell	12	Lab (7) Con (4) NOC (4)
Rotherham	11	Lab (15)
Sheffield		Lab (15)
Barnsley	7	Lab (15)
Doncaster	7	Lab (15)
Salford	7	Lab (7) NOC (6) Con (2)
Liverpool	6	NOC (8) Lab (7)
Manchester	6	Lab (15)
Wakefield	6	Lab (15)
Dudley	5	Lab (7) Con (4) NOC (4)
South Tyneside	5	Lab (14) NOC (1)
St. Helens	5	Lab (15)
Coventry	4	Lab (14) Con (1)
Gateshead	4	Lab (15)
Solihull	4	Con (12) NOC (3)
Tameside	4	Lab (13) Con (2)
Birmingham	2	Lab (10) Con (4) NOC (1)
Sefton	2	Con (8) NOC (7)
Wolverhampton	2	Lab (12) NOC (3)
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1	Lab (15)
Wirral	1	Con (7) NOC (7) Lab (1)

(The election of 1979 and hence the term of office resulting from this election has been excluded from the analysis).

In the metropolitan boroughs there are fourteen authorities that appear in both the top and bottom ten performing authorities, compared to London that had only five such instances. This is a quite surprising result to find as there are fewer boroughs in London (32) than there are in the metropolitan areas (36), hence the smaller chance of a London borough 'hiding' in the middle of the table, and not at the extreme ends. There are fifteen elections in our metropolitan borough data-set compared to nine in London, so this may account for some of the explanation.

Liverpool provides an example of a borough that has a wide variation in its level of turnout over elections. While it appeared in the league of boroughs with low rates of turnout six times (1973 to 1980 and again in 1994), it also appeared in the list of boroughs with high levels of turnout on four occasions (1984 to 1988). A brief examination of the political situation in the borough may provide us with some background for the increased levels of turnout after 1983. In 1984, the left-wing council decided to increase spending on local services which resulted in a budget deficit being set. In 1985, councillors in Liverpool were surcharged and disqualified from office for setting their budgets late in an attempt to avoid the spending limits defined by central government. A number of Labour councillors including Derek Hatton, the deputy leader, who were sympathetic to the ideas of the Militant Tendency which had infiltrated the Labour party in Liverpool, were expelled from the national party. The actions of Liverpool City Council in the mid-1980s were of such importance at the time, they were being discussed at the national level and in the national media. It is suggested that the political circumstances of the borough may be part of the explanation for the high levels of turnout.

This discussion of the 'deviant' rates of turnout in the metropolitan boroughs shows that there is some consistency to the level of turnout. It seems that we will always see Stockport near the top of the turnout league in the metropolitan boroughs, while Sunderland is likely to appear at the bottom. Some boroughs can change their position in the league table of turnouts over time, so we should be careful not to make generalisations from average turnout figures for boroughs. An average turnout figure over a 20 year period may not tell the whole story behind the participation in the borough. If at all possible, we should examine the variation in turnout within a borough and then analyse the turnout at the ward level, as this will give a clearer picture of the level of voter participation.

Finally, although we have highlighted that there are 'deviant' turnout rates that appear over time, Table 4.10 indicates that there is quite strong evidence to suggest that if we know the turnout of a borough in one year, it will be a good indicator of the turnout in future election

years. The values of the correlation coefficients range from .23 between the elections in 1978 and 1984, while the highest result of .95 come from the relationship between 1991 and 1992, elections that are close together in time.

Table 4.10: A correlation matrix between elections in the metropolitan boroughs (1973-1994).

Year	1973	1975	1976	1978	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
1973	1														
1975	.84	1													
1976	.79	.88	1												
1978	.53	.61	.72	1											
1980	.77	.69	.70	.69	1										
1982	.61	.58	.60	.50	.65	1									
1983	.66	.59	.57	.48	.73	.89	1								
1984	.52	.41	.32	.23	.57	.60	.74	1							
1986	.63	.61	.50	.31	.64	.57	.71	.79	1						
1987	.69	.67	.55	.34	.71	.72	.83	.81	.90	1					
1988	.59	.60	.53	.41	.72	.74	.83	.79	.86	.90	1				
1990	.61	.67	.55	.35	.61	.68	.73	.57	.81	.82	.79	1			
1991	.65	.71	.56	.43	.60	.75	.79	.61	.80	.83	.81	.86	1		
1992	.58	.63	.52	.37	.56	.77	.77	.54	.70	.79	.78	.84	.95	1	
1994	.58	.64	.58	.44	.52	.68	.69	.49	.62	.68	.65	.81	.87	.90	1

4.4: Turnout variation in the shire districts.

The Local Government Act of 1972 created a two-tier system of 39 shire counties, and 296 district councils in England. Our data-set includes the first election for these authorities in 1973, and goes up to the election in 1992 - fourteen elections. There are 2,320 cases in total. The analysis of the shire districts is complicated by the fact that the districts can choose which electoral system they wish to follow. Most districts hold elections for the whole council once every four years, in wards that currently vary from one- to five-member. These are known as all-out districts. The remaining districts that make up about a third of the total have annual elections, with one year left fallow for the county council elections. These are known as districts that elect by thirds. There are two types of districts that elect by thirds, those which have wards that vary from single- to three- member which

means that all electors do not necessarily go to the polls every year, and are known as unequal thirds. The other type of thirds are equal thirds, which is where a local authority follows the metropolitan borough pattern of having three member wards with all wards having elections every year.

As there are a large number of cases in the districts and they have the choice of how to hold their elections, there is a great amount of variation in the composition of the districts at election time. For example, the districts vary quite considerably in the size of their electorate involved in the elections. Leominster is a district that elects by thirds, only 13,433 people had the opportunity to vote in 1982. Eight wards in Leominster were uncontested in this election so this electorate figure is reduced further. This compares to 312,044 people who could vote in the 1973 election in Bristol. The districts also vary according to the number of wards that are involved in an election. Tamworth only had four wards up for election in 1973, while East Lindsey had the greatest number of electoral divisions in one election when 48 wards were contested in the all-out elections from 1983 to 1991. As the number of wards up for election in a district differs, there is also a wide range in the number of councillors that are elected in district elections. Rutland only elected 20 councillors between 1973 and 1991, while Bristol had the largest number of councillors elected in one election when in 1973 and in 1976 there were 84 newly elected representatives.

Although districts vary considerably according to the factors outlined above, their functions are the same regardless of their composition. The districts are responsible for services such as housing, environmental health and amenities, which is a much smaller range of functions than the top tier of county councils. This also means that less expenditure is under their control. Although the districts have a comparatively smaller role to play than the counties, this has not really affected the level of voter participation in elections. There are many examples where turnout in the districts has been higher than that for the county elections (Rallings and Thrasher, 1992). This finding is contrary to the belief that as the county elections are said to be more important, then their turnout should also be correspondingly

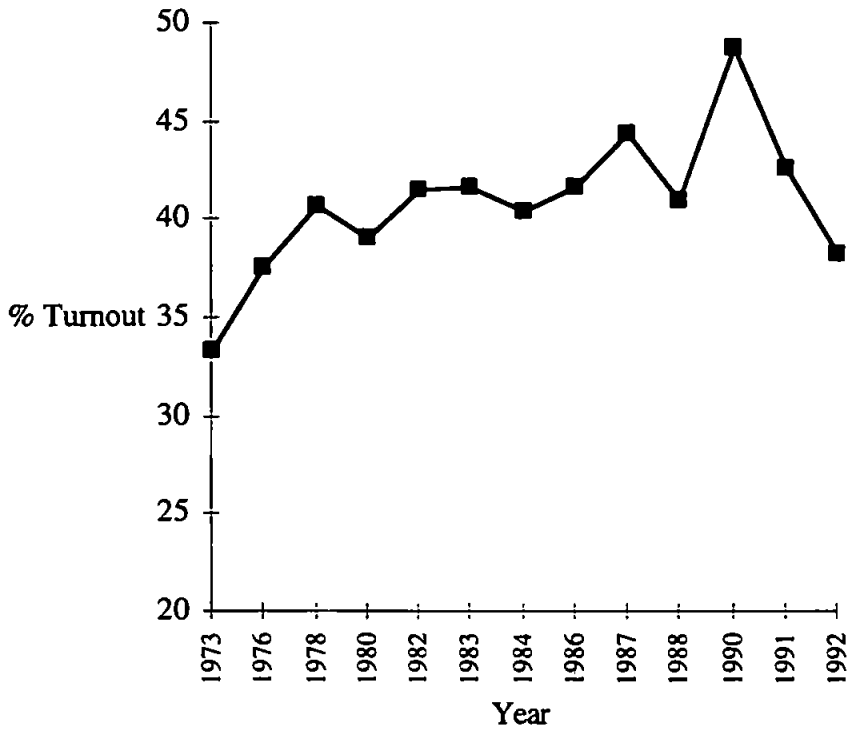
higher. The electorate may be either unaware, or just indifferent to the greater responsibilities held by the counties. The main advantage for the districts is that they are seen to have closer contact with the individual voter, and are a more important local concern.

The three main areas of turnout variation that were examined in London and the metropolitan boroughs, will now be replicated for the shire districts. This involves examining the average turnout in the shire districts in every year of the study, comparing the average turnout between individual districts and finally, examining the turnout figures in every district and in every election to determine which districts produce 'deviant' rates of turnout.

4.4.1: Historical background to turnout rates in the shire districts.

The average turnout in the shire districts is positioned around the local government mean of 40%. Over the fourteen elections and the nineteen years, the average turnout is 40.9%. This is 1.9 percentage points higher than the figure for the London boroughs and 2.7 percentage points greater than the average for the metropolitan boroughs. Figure 4.3 shows that there is a considerable range in the turnout figures between elections in the districts. The election of 1973 produced the lowest turnout in an election with a figure of 33.3%, which contrasts to the highest turnout that occurred in 1990 when 48.8% of the electorate voted. This means that there is a range of 15.5 percentage points between the highest and lowest turnout figures in an election. The level of turnout looks to be slightly increasing over time by a percentage point or two, which is a similar discovery to that found in London and the metropolitan boroughs. It would be logical to expect that the reasons put forward to explain the especially high and low turnout figures in particular elections in London and the metropolitan boroughs, can also be used to account for the results in the shire districts, i.e. the poll tax in 1990, and voter fatigue in 1992.

Figure 4.3: Average turnout rates in the shire districts (1973-1992).



4.4.2: Average turnout rates in the shire districts.

In both London and the metropolitan boroughs, we have found quite a wide variance in rates of turnout between boroughs. We have attempted to explain this finding by arguing that the timing of the election could have been an important determinant of turnout in some years, before a general election in 1983 and 1987, while an issue such as the poll tax may have been an influential factor in the election of 1990. The next step is to look at the variation in the levels of turnout according to the individual shire districts themselves.

The first step in the analysis is to take averages of each individual district turnout over the time period. Rossendale comes top of the table with the highest average figure of 51.7%. The lowest average turnout in the districts came from Kingston-upon-Hull with a figure of 28.5%. This provides a range between these average of over 23 percentage points. The

equivalent ranges in London and the metropolitan boroughs were 22.3 and 14.5 percentage points respectively. Using the same criteria that was employed in London and the metropolitan boroughs (mean for the type of local authority plus or minus fifteen percentage points), we find thirteen districts that produced an average rate of turnout above this band and ten districts which fell below. The districts with the highest average turnout levels were Rossendale, Exeter, Welwyn Hatfield, Pendle, Tynedale, Craven, North Hertfordshire, St. Albans, Derbyshire Dales, Leominster, Eastbourne, Winchester and Tandridge. Kingston-upon-Hull, Stoke-on-Trent, Middlesbrough, Holderness, Hartlepool, Cleethorpes, New Forest, Glanford, Boothferry and East Yorkshire made up the ten districts with average rates of turnout fifteen percentage points less than the average turnout for all the districts. Table 4.11 shows all the districts ranked according to their average rate of voter participation over the fourteen elections.

Table 4.11: List of district councils in descending order of their average rate of turnout (1973-1992).

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	S.d
Rossendale	51.7	46.8	54.9	2.2
Exeter	50.8	42.8	57.1	4.3
Welwyn Hatfield	50.0	40.1	55.5	4.4
Pendle	49.7	41.6	57.0	3.8
Tynedale	49.6	47.4	52.8	2.3
Craven	49.3	41.8	54.5	3.6
North Hertfordshire	49.0	36.8	57.8	5.9
St. Albans	48.9	41.1	55.5	4.4
Derbyshire Dales	48.5	41.4	56.5	6.2
Leominster	47.8	41.5	55.6	4.4
Eastbourne	47.7	44.0	52.2	3.0
Winchester	47.6	39.6	56.3	5.3
Tandridge	47.4	40.1	54.7	4.8
Bath	46.9	35.8	57.1	6.2
Brentwood	46.7	30.7	56.8	6.6
Kingswood	46.4	41.3	49.5	3.2
York	46.4	38.5	52.7	4.5
High Peak	46.3	39.7	49.8	4.2
Three Rivers	46.3	35.2	51.5	4.1
Eastleigh	46.2	41.2	52.8	3.7
Warwick	45.9	40.0	49.2	3.7
Hyndburn	45.6	37.0	51.9	4.3
Broxtowe	45.5	35.9	50.0	5.6
Rushcliffe	45.2	34.6	53.7	7.1
Uttlesford	45.1	41.2	48.5	2.7
Woking	45.1	38.2	51.3	3.6
Chester-le-Street	45.0	40.3	48.7	3.1
Gloucester	44.9	35.1	51.2	4.9

Table 4.11: cont:

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	S.d
Chester	44.8	32.3	54.8	6.8
Chorley	44.7	39.3	52.5	3.5
Adur	44.6	37.5	49.4	3.5
Castle Morpeth	44.6	36.7	47.7	4.5
South Lakeland	44.6	37.4	51.6	4.6
Gedling	44.5	35.0	52.1	6.5
Dover	44.4	40.5	48.7	3.8
Hinckley and Bosworth	44.4	38.6	50.7	4.3
North Devon	44.4	37.3	48.8	4.6
Amber Valley	44.3	34.1	55.8	8.1
Hertsmere	44.3	37.8	49.6	4.3
Mole Valley	44.3	29.1	51.3	5.6
Berwick-upon-Tweed	44.2	41.9	47.9	2.3
Cambridge	44.2	34.9	50.9	5.4
East Devon	44.2	36.4	48.5	4.1
Gravesham	44.2	36.7	47.7	4.5
Macclesfield	44.2	39.0	53.6	4.2
Elmbridge	44.1	32.2	51.9	5.1
Oxford	44.1	35.3	50.7	4.0
Dacorum	44.0	32.7	51.6	6.9
Lewes	44.0	33.8	54.0	8.2
Stratford-upon-Avon	44.0	37.4	53.1	5.0
Watford	44.0	38.3	48.5	3.0
Brighton	43.9	37.1	50.1	4.3
North Bedfordshire	43.9	33.2	51.5	5.2
Rugby	43.9	38.8	51.4	3.9
Norwich	43.8	34.1	51.2	4.8
Canterbury	43.7	39.3	46.3	2.9
Chelmsford	43.7	33.8	49.5	6.2
South Norfolk	43.6	31.7	52.5	8.8
Wansdyke	43.4	38.8	47.9	3.5
Waverley	43.3	39.8	47.3	3.4
Northavon	43.2	34.3	48.8	5.7
Wyre Forest	43.1	38.3	51.5	4.1
Bristol	43.0	26.9	52.4	7.4
Cheltenham	43.0	34.8	48.9	4.4
Dartford	43.0	30.8	50.4	7.7
Stroud	43.0	38.2	51.1	4.8
Plymouth	42.9	33.2	48.4	6.2
Braintree	42.8	38.7	45.8	2.9
Bridgnorth	42.8	41.0	44.4	1.3
Burnley	42.8	30.6	49.6	5.7
Copeland	42.8	36.4	48.0	4.5
Lancaster	42.8	39.1	46.5	2.7
Weymouth and Portland	42.8	38.5	49.3	3.8
Mid Sussex	42.7	39.5	47.6	3.0
Vale of White Horse	42.6	35.6	48.1	5.7
East Northamptonshire	42.5	40.7	46.0	2.1
Newark and Sherwood	42.5	33.9	47.3	5.4
Ribble Valley	42.5	40.0	46.6	2.7
Tonbridge and Malling	42.5	38.3	48.1	3.6
Daventry	42.3	33.6	49.2	5.3
Erewash	42.3	35.9	46.9	4.7
Maldon	42.3	38.8	46.5	3.3
South Northamptonshire	42.3	40.0	45.4	2.0
Medina	42.2	30.2	47.4	7.1
Suffolk Coastal	42.2	39.2	46.9	3.2

Table 4.11: cont:

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	S.d
Lincoln	42.1	34.4	49.4	4.5
Preston	42.1	28.0	46.7	5.2
Blackpool	42.0	35.9	48.4	4.6
Gosport	42.0	34.4	48.7	4.2
Harborough	42.0	33.9	49.0	6.9
South Herefordshire	42.0	31.5	48.6	4.6
Bassetlaw	41.9	32.5	50.2	5.5
Oadby and Wigston	41.9	34.3	51.3	5.9
Selby	41.9	38.8	44.9	2.6
Waveney	41.9	36.7	53.6	5.1
West Dorset	41.9	35.2	46.1	4.5
Congleton	41.8	33.2	51.2	5.7
Guilford	41.8	36.1	45.9	3.7
Stevenage	41.8	28.2	48.7	5.7
Worcester	41.7	32.0	48.2	5.2
Basingstoke and Deane	41.6	32.3	49.6	5.3
Colchester	41.6	32.3	45.7	3.5
Bracknell	41.5	33.1	44.8	4.8
North Dorset	41.5	36.4	47.3	4.2
Rochford	41.5	31.5	49.7	4.9
Harlow	41.4	26.0	49.1	5.9
Harrogate	41.4	36.1	49.7	4.7
Sedgemoor	41.4	37.6	48.0	4.3
South Somerset	41.4	35.6	46.8	4.9
East Hertfordshire	41.3	34.8	45.7	4.1
North Warwickshire	41.3	37.3	45.5	3.4
South Wight	41.3	34.9	45.9	4.8
Ellesmere and Neston	41.2	24.2	51.9	7.4
Shrewsbury and Atcham	41.2	32.2	50.8	5.7
South Bedfordshire	41.2	37.1	47.3	3.6
South Ribble	41.1	33.9	44.6	4.2
West Lancashire	41.1	27.4	54.4	6.8
Basildon	41.0	28.0	48.3	5.6
Cannock Chase	41.0	31.1	47.8	4.9
Durham	41.0	34.1	49.0	5.8
Milton Keynes	41.0	35.7	45.8	3.3
Newcastle-under-Lyme	41.0	33.7	49.2	4.1
Swale	41.0	37.3	48.1	3.7
Charnwood	40.9	34.6	44.8	3.9
Windsor and Maidenhead	40.9	35.9	45.5	4.4
Ashford	40.8	29.1	46.1	6.7
Blackburn	40.8	33.9	50.6	4.8
Penwith	40.8	25.1	56.2	10.5
Carlisle	40.7	32.0	45.5	4.5
Chesterfield	40.7	35.4	46.5	4.8
Crawley	40.7	28.4	45.5	4.8
South Hams	40.7	34.1	44.1	4.0
Darlington	40.6	26.8	47.6	8.3
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	40.5	38.4	43.1	1.8
North West Leicestershire	40.5	33.5	46.6	4.7
Leicester	40.4	30.5	46.4	5.2
Malvern Hills	40.4	38.5	43.1	2.4
Reading	40.4	32.6	44.8	3.6
Wear Valley	40.4	36.5	45.4	3.3
Bromsgrove	40.3	38.6	43.4	1.9
Torbay	40.1	32.9	54.4	7.0
Allerdale	40.0	34.8	43.9	3.9

Table 4.11: cont:

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	S.d
Portsmouth	40.0	34.8	48.0	4.3
Derby	39.9	24.3	51.9	7.2
Fareham	39.9	31.9	49.9	5.3
Flyde	39.9	32.6	43.4	4.2
North Wiltshire	39.9	32.7	47.2	6.2
Southampton	39.9	26.2	47.2	5.8
Chiltern	39.8	34.4	45.3	4.1
Purbeck	39.8	29.1	49.5	6.2
West Oxfordshire	39.8	26.1	47.3	6.0
Cherwell	39.7	33.9	47.0	4.6
North East Derbyshire	39.7	36.1	41.8	2.3
South Oxfordshire	39.7	34.5	43.6	3.6
Wychavon	39.7	35.2	41.8	2.6
Wyre	39.7	33.3	45.0	4.4
Crewe and Nantwich	39.6	27.8	51.3	6.5
Maidstone	39.6	30.7	47.4	5.3
Peterborough	39.6	28.6	46.0	4.5
South Derbyshire	39.6	33.7	43.3	3.7
Bolsover	39.5	37.4	44.9	3.1
Chichester	39.5	35.9	44.4	4.5
Scunthorpe	39.5	25.3	46.2	6.1
East Staffordshire	39.4	31.6	45.6	6.3
Lichfield	39.4	25.7	44.2	7.9
Nuneaton and Bedworth	39.4	31.5	47.3	4.7
Tendring	39.4	32.7	45.1	4.8
Luton	39.3	28.7	44.3	6.4
Wellingborough	39.3	36.0	42.8	2.8
East Hampshire	39.2	24.5	45.6	8.6
Broadland	39.1	28.3	47.3	6.1
Epping Forest	39.1	30.1	48.7	5.5
Rother	39.1	32.1	43.9	4.6
Slough	39.0	31.9	43.7	3.5
Stafford	39.0	33.3	43.9	4.7
Worthing	39.0	32.8	44.7	4.3
Great Yarmouth	38.9	26.9	47.9	5.7
South Shropshire	38.9	32.8	43.3	4.2
Kennet	38.8	35.8	41.7	2.3
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	38.8	26.8	46.5	7.9
Poole	38.8	33.1	44.9	4.9
Southend-on-Sea	38.8	32.0	48.4	4.5
Teesdale	38.8	35.9	42.9	2.8
Thanet	38.8	36.4	40.2	1.5
Tunbridge Wells	38.8	28.4	46.8	5.6
Redditch	38.7	32.1	46.4	5.0
Reigate and Banstead	38.7	29.3	48.2	5.2
West Lindsey	38.7	33.4	44.0	3.6
Babergh	38.6	36.1	40.7	2.3
Gillingham	38.6	34.3	46.5	4.0
Hastings	38.6	33.6	45.4	3.8
North Norfolk	38.6	34.3	44.9	4.5
Rushmoor	38.6	33.6	44.1	3.4
Caradon	38.5	34.5	43.2	3.4
Mid Suffolk	38.5	30.6	45.4	6.5
Newbury	38.5	29.5	44.1	5.9
Nottingham	38.5	25.1	46.2	8.2
South Cambridgeshire	38.5	26.7	46.2	6.0
Taunton Deane	38.5	32.5	45.6	5.7

Table 4.11: cont:

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	S.d
Spelthorne	38.4	33.4	40.9	3.0
Tamworth	38.3	17.1	47.4	7.5
Alnwick	38.2	32.0	41.7	4.1
Wokingham	38.2	31.6	44.9	4.8
Salisbury	38.1	34.2	39.6	2.2
St. Edmundsbury	38.1	34.9	40.2	2.1
Northampton	38.0	32.4	40.4	3.3
Sevonoaks	38.0	31.9	41.9	3.8
South Staffordshire	38.0	29.8	45.5	5.6
Huntingdonshire	37.8	28.6	44.2	4.4
Ipswich	37.8	26.0	48.0	5.3
Mid Bedfordshire	37.8	33.2	41.9	3.2
Runneymede	37.7	33.7	43.2	2.9
Warrington	37.7	33.2	42.7	4.0
Woodspring	37.7	31.0	41.3	3.7
Shepway	37.6	31.7	45.6	5.9
Breckland	37.5	33.8	42.8	3.8
Great Grimsby	37.5	25.9	45.8	5.9
Scarborough	37.5	33.8	40.1	2.4
Sedgefield	37.5	34.5	39.6	2.2
Broxbourne	37.4	27.1	45.0	4.9
South Buckinghamshire	37.4	30.6	41.7	4.2
Castle Point	37.3	35.5	39.6	1.8
Horsham	37.3	29.8	40.9	4.6
Test Valley	37.3	32.0	43.9	5.0
Beverley	37.1	24.8	43.8	8.3
Hart	37.1	23.0	43.7	5.5
Vale Royal	37.1	34.3	39.9	2.2
Wycombe	37.1	31.3	41.3	4.3
Fenland	37.0	35.5	40.6	2.1
West Devon	36.9	30.1	41.7	4.4
Hambleton	36.8	31.2	44.8	5.8
Ryedale	36.8	31.2	42.5	5.2
West Somerset	36.8	34.9	40.6	2.3
Hove	36.7	30.3	39.7	3.8
North Kesteven	36.6	30.2	42.0	5.1
Thamesdown	36.6	24.4	44.8	5.3
Rochester-upon-Medway	36.5	30.9	39.4	3.5
Kettering	36.4	30.4	41.0	5.0
Derwentside	36.3	29.4	40.4	4.3
Barrow-in-Furness	36.2	24.4	44.7	5.6
Blyth Valley	36.2	29.9	45.1	6.2
East Lindsey	36.2	33.2	39.9	3.2
Mendip	36.2	23.8	47.0	9.7
Tewkesbury	36.2	26.7	42.0	6.2
Corby	36.1	21.3	44.1	9.3
Melton	36.1	24.2	42.4	7.4
West Wiltshire	36.1	27.4	42.5	6.5
Surrey Heath	36.0	27.3	41.9	5.3
South Kesteven	35.9	32.0	38.9	2.5
Blaby	35.7	25.9	41.0	5.7
Staffordshire Moorlands	35.7	31.0	38.5	3.0
Arun	35.6	25.6	40.6	5.9
Cotswold	35.6	27.2	39.5	5.0
Havant	35.6	26.2	49.4	6.4
North Cornwall	35.6	33.3	39.2	2.4
Stockton-on-Tees	35.6	25.7	42.6	8.0

Table 4.11: cont:

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	S.d
Christchurch	35.5	19.9	42.3	9.4
Richmondshire	35.5	30.9	41.8	4.0
Epsom and Ewell	35.4	25.9	40.9	6.2
Wealden	35.4	28.8	40.5	5.2
The Wrekin	35.2	27.5	40.7	5.1
Aylesbury Vale	35.1	24.9	40.5	6.1
Carrick	35.1	29.5	39.8	3.7
East Dorset	35.1	21.7	41.3	7.7
Rutland	35.1	26.3	42.7	7.3
Hereford	35.0	20.0	44.7	6.8
Teignbridge*	34.8	30.4	39.6	3.5
East Yorkshire	34.5	32.2	38.2	2.5
Boothferry	34.2	26.7	39.1	5.1
Boston*	34.2	32.3	35.9	1.6
Ashfield*	34.1	22.9	40.5	6.8
Glanford	33.9	26.0	38.2	5.4
Torridge*	33.8	28.4	40.8	5.2
Forest of Dean*	33.7	31.9	35.7	1.8
Halton*	33.4	24.4	43.0	5.3
New Forest	33.4	25.2	39.6	5.7
North Shropshire*	33.4	28.5	38.3	3.9
Cleethorpes	32.7	25.2	39.7	6.4
Thurrock*	32.6	20.0	44.0	5.7
Forest Heath*	32.5	27.6	38.2	3.2
Mansfield*	32.5	18.7	46.5	12.4
Easington*	32.4	24.2	40.0	6.4
South Holland*	32.4	31.2	33.2	0.8
Hartlepool	32.3	26.4	43.5	4.9
Eden*	32.2	28.2	34.9	2.6
Mid Devon*	32.2	24.9	37.4	5.3
Wansbeck*	32.2	20.2	41.5	8.1
Bournmouth*	32.1	23.7	38.3	5.6
Holderness	31.9	29.8	33.7	1.5
Restormel*	31.3	28.4	36.8	3.8
Middlesbrough	30.5	17.1	40.1	10.2
Stoke-on-Trent	30.2	19.2	39.3	5.1
Oswestry*	29.2	24.5	32.9	3.7
Kingston-upon-Hull	28.5	21.2	35.5	4.1
Kerrier*	27.5	20.0	35.8	6.3
East Cambridgeshire*	25.6	17.0	31.1	5.7

(The districts with an * have been excluded from the analysis of average turnout rates in the districts, the analysis of 'deviant' turnout rates in the districts (section 4.4.3) and the residual analysis in section 5.14.1. Although these figures have been derived from a published source, because of the problems calculating turnout using the algorithm for total vote, a comparison of these figures with the turnout rates of their respective county councils make the figures look unreliable).

The next step in this analysis is to focus upon those districts at the extreme ends of the turnout league and attempt to discover the reasons for their position. Of the ten districts with average rates of turnout fifteen percentage points less than the average for all the districts, only two of them, Stoke-on-Trent and Middlesbrough, were controlled by one party through

all the elections. In London, four out of the seven lowest turnout boroughs were controlled by the Labour party, and in the metropolitan boroughs both boroughs with an average turnout more than fifteen percentage points less than the average turnout figures were controlled by Labour. Hence, in the districts the relationship between the low level of turnout and the dominance of a district by the Labour party does not appear to be as strong. The political histories of those thirteen districts which had an average rate of turnout more than fifteen percentage points higher than the average turnout for all the districts, shows that only one of them (Leominster) has been controlled by one group (Independent) between 1973 and 1992. All the other districts have either been controlled by more than one party over their history, or have had periods where no party was in overall control.

Rossendale and Exeter can be used as examples of politically volatile districts. At general elections, Rossendale is part of the Rossendale and Darwen seat, which has been described by Waller as, 'a classical marginal seat in the 1970's, given to modest swings yet electing a member of whichever party won the General Election in three of the four contests of the decade' (1991:422). The situation in local government indicates a series of fairly tight contests for the control of the council between the Conservatives and the Labour party. In 1976, the Conservatives took charge of the council, while before this date it was under no overall control. The Conservatives stranglehold lasted until 1986 when Labour took over remaining in control ever since. Perhaps, the changing political composition of the council over time could be a contributory factor in determining the high level of turnout.

Exeter is the second placed district in Table 4.11 and is one in which Conservative and Labour are very close competitors. The Conservatives were in control between 1976 and 1984, but from 1984 to 1992, the district was under no overall control as it was between 1973 and 1976. The electoral registration officer could not provide us with any simple reasons for the high rates of turnout in the district, but it was suggested that the thoroughness of the canvassing conducted by the local parties has some impact on the percentage of people voting.

The shire districts are the only type of local authority where we can really examine the impact of geography, because there is obviously a much wider geographical spread in the districts compared to London and the metropolitan boroughs. There is great debate over the singular impact of context as a determinant of voting. The traditional argument is that the social context of environment in which a potential voter resides, plays an important role in deciding how they are going to vote. Johnston *et al.*, for example, writes that, '...people in similar socio-economic contexts and with similar attitudes vote quite differently according to their regional contexts' (1987:348). McAllister, however, disagrees with this view, when he concludes from his analysis that, '...the social context in which a person lives ceases to have any statistically significant effect on how they vote' (1987:26). If we examine the thirteen shire districts which had average rates of turnout more than fifteen percentage points greater than the mean figures for the shire districts, we find that three of the districts come from Hertfordshire (Welwyn Hatfield, North Hertfordshire and St. Albans) and two are from Lancashire (Rossendale and Pendle). As for the ten shire districts at the bottom of the table, six districts from Humberside appear (Kingston-upon-Hull, Holderness, Cleethorpes, Glanford, Boothferry and East Yorkshire) and two from Cleveland (Middlesbrough and Hartlepool). The two other districts come from Hampshire (New Forest) and Staffordshire (Stoke-on-Trent). Such a concentration of districts within a small number of counties is a curiosity that needs some explanation. What factors can be suggested for the low levels of turnout in the districts at the bottom of the table?

Kingston-upon-Hull (Humberside) has been controlled by the Labour party from 1973 to 1992. It is a very strong Labour council with their smallest overall majority being a relatively high 25 seats in 1976. A local source informs us that there is no campaign at election time, as Labour are the only party that puts out leaflets and posters etc. The local respondent believed that in such circumstances, where locals know that Labour are going to win, it is very hard to maintain interest in the election in what is almost a charade. Similarly, Stoke-on-Trent is a council that has been controlled by Labour between 1973 and 1992. Waller writes from a national context that, 'Stoke-on-Trent is almost certainly the most

favourable city in England to the Labour party' (1991:494). The three candidates from Labour are often only opposed by one from the Conservatives in the local elections. It seems, therefore, that the dominant position of Labour in the councils we have used as examples, depresses the interest of the electorate to turn out to vote.

4.4.3: 'Deviant' turnout rates in the shire districts.

The final area to examine concerning the turnout rates in the shire districts are the raw figures for turnout, that have not been aggregated to form an average. Analysing the minimum turnout figures in Table 4.11 shows that they vary between 17.1% in both Middlesbrough and Tamworth in 1973, and 47.4% in Tynedale in 1983. The maximum turnout figures are between 33.7% in Holderness in 1976 and 57.8% from North Hertfordshire in 1983. The range between the minimum figures is 30.3 percentage points, while the maximum turnout rates are 24.1 percentage points apart. This shows that there is a significant amount of variation between turnout rates in the districts. When the highest and lowest turnout figures in a district are compared, we can see that the frequently quoted average turnout figure of 40% is some distance away from both figures. Indeed, there is more than 40 percentage points difference between the figures (17.1%-57.8%).

To investigate the consistency of turnout in the shire districts over time, we replicated the analysis carried out for the two other types of local authorities, by studying those districts that appeared at the extreme ends of the turnout table in every election. It was decided that to discover a pattern as we did in London and the metropolitan boroughs, we should increase the size of our selection from the ends of the turnout table from ten to 20 local authorities. The results in Table 4.12 show that there were 76 districts that had at least one appearance in the top 20 turnout rates. Nearly half of these districts (33) only appeared once in the table, so there was some evidence of the same districts appearing a number of times in the table. Rossendale made the most number of appearances with thirteen top 20 positions. If districts have all-out elections, then there are only five elections in which they can appear in the top

20. We should, therefore, not neglect those districts that appear a number of times out of their five chances. Derbyshire Dales (1973, 1987 and 1991) and Kingswood (1973, 1976 and 1983) for example, each appear amongst the districts with the 20 highest turnout rates on three occasions.

Table 4.12 shows that eighteen districts appear amongst the top 20 turnout districts in more than five elections. Of these, four districts come from Hertfordshire (Welwyn Hatfield, North Hertfordshire, St. Albans and Three Rivers), three districts are from Lancashire (Rossendale, Pendle and Hyndburn) and two districts each are from Hampshire (Eastleigh and Winchester) and Surrey (Tandridge and Mole Valley). Apart from these districts, there is no easily identifiable geographical pattern to the districts which make a number of appearances in the top ten. The political background of the top eighteen districts shows that all of them, except Leominster, have never been under the control of one party over their history. In Pendle for example, Labour, Conservative and the Alliance have all controlled the district for two terms of office each, while the district has been under no overall control on seven occasions. This illustrates that this is a politically volatile district and is one where the closeness of the contest at the district level may influence the decision of some people whether they go to the polls.

Of course, it is possible for a district to have high rates of turnout even if the district has always been under one party control. Leominster show this to be the case, but there are also two other districts that have more than one appearance in Table 4.12 and have been controlled by the same party throughout its history. Burnley had a rate of turnout that put it among the districts with the highest turnouts in the elections of 1978, 1980 and 1984. This district was controlled by Labour between 1973 and 1992. The other district that behaves in the same way is East Devon. It had a high turnout relative to other districts in 1982 and 1986 and has always been controlled by the Conservatives.

Table 4.12: The number of times a shire district appears in the top 20 district turnout rates between 1973 and 1992 (fourteen elections).

District	Number of appearances in the top 20	Political control of district (terms of office)
Rossendale	13	Con (6) Lab (6)
Pendle	11	NOC (7) Con (2) Lab (2) Lib Dem (2)
Welwyn Hatfield	11	Lab (10) Con (3)
Exeter	10	NOC (8) Con (2)
North Hertfordshire	10	Con (11) NOC (1)
St. Albans	10	Con (7) NOC (5)
Eastbourne	9	Con (6) Lib Dem (5) NOC (2)
Tandridge	9	Con (10) NOC (3)
Winchester	9	NOC (7) Con (5) Ind (1)
Brentwood	8	Con (11) Lib Dem (1) NOC (1)
Craven	8	NOC (7) Con (5)
Leominster	7	Ind (12)
Three Rivers	7	Con (6) NOC (5) Lib Dem (2)
Bath	6	Con (8) NOC (5)
Eastleigh	6	NOC (8) Con (4) Lib Dem (1)
Hyndburn	6	Lab (9) Con (2) NOC (1)
Mole Valley	6	NOC (12) Ind (1)
York	6	Lab (6) NOC (5) Con (1)
Amber Valley	5	Lab (8) Con (2) NOC (2)
Woking	5	Con (8) NOC (5)
Adur	4	Lib Dem (8) NOC (4)
Cambridge	4	NOC (6) Lab (5) Con (2)
Chester	4	Con (6) NOC (6)
Chorley	4	NOC (8) Con (4) Lab (1)
Hertsmere	4	Con (12) NOC (1)
Penwith	4	Ind (6) NOC (6)
Burnley	3	Lab (13)
Derbyshire Dales	3	Con (4) NOC (1)
Gloucester	3	Con (7) NOC (5)
Kingswood	3	Con (2) NOC (2) Lab (1)
Macclesfield	3	Con (11) NOC (1)
South Lakeland	3	NOC (10) Ind (2)
Stratford-upon-Avon	3	Con (9) NOC (2) Ind (1)
Bassetlaw	2	Lab (11) NOC (1)
Cannock Chase	2	Lab (9) NOC (4)
East Devon	2	Con (8)
Elmridge	2	Lab (9) NOC (4)
North Devon	2	Ind (3) Lib Dem (1) NOC (1)
Preston	2	Lab (11) Con (2)
South Norfolk	2	NOC (3) Con (1) Ind (1)
South Northamptonshire	2	Con (3) NOC (2)
Tynedale	2	NOC (4) Ind (1)
Watford	2	Lab (12) NOC (1)
Basildon	1	Lab (6) NOC (5) Con (1)
Basingstoke and Deane	1	Con (9) NOC (4)

Table 4.12: cont:

District	Number of appearances in the top 20	Political control of district (terms of office)
Berwick-upon-Tweed	1	NOC (3) Ind (2)
Brighton	1	Lab (4) NOC (4) Con (2)
Bristol	1	Lab (8) NOC (2)
Broxtowe	1	Con (5)
Castle Morpeth	1	NOC (5)
Chester-le-Street	1	Lab (5)
Colchester	1	NOC (7) Con (6)
Congleton	1	NOC (7) Con (5) Lib Dem (1)
Crewe and Nantwich	1	NOC (8) Lab (4)
Dacorum	1	Con (4) Lab (1)
Dartford	1	Con (3) Lab (2)
Gedling	1	Con (5)
High Peak	1	NOC (4) Con (1)
Hinckley and Bosworth	1	Con (6) NOC (1)
Lancaster	1	Con (3) NOC (2)
Lewes	1	Con (4) LD (1)
North Bedfordshire	1	NOC (7) Con (3)
Oadby and Wigston	1	Con (10) Lib Dem (1)
Oxford	1	Lab (11) Con (1)
Ribble Valley	1	Con (5)
Rochford	1	Con (9) NOC (4)
Rushcliffe	1	Con (5)
Scunthorpe	1	Lab (12)
South Herefordshire	1	Lib Dem (10) NOC (2)
Tonbridge	1	Con (10)
Torbay		Con (7) Lib Dem (1) NOC (1)
Uttlesford	1	Con (5)
Warwick	1	Con (4) NOC (1)
Waveney	1	NOC (4) Con (3) Lab (3)
West Dorset	1	Ind (5)
West Lancashire	1	Con (9) NOC (4)

(Where the Alliance have won control of a borough, their term(s) of office have been grouped together with the Liberal Democrats).

We repeated the same analysis for the districts that appeared at the bottom end of the league of turnout rates. The results in Table 4.13 show that there is more variation to the districts that appeared in the bottom 20, because there were 113 districts that produced a turnout that put them in the bottom 20 in at least one election. Again, nearly half of the districts (53) made only one appearance in the table, indicating that there were many instances of districts consistently producing relatively low levels of turnout from one election to another. Nine

districts appear in the top 20 turnout districts in more than five elections. The districts that produce the consistently lowest levels of turnout are Stoke-on-Trent (twelve appearances), Hartlepool (eleven) and Kingston-upon-Hull (ten). Out of the districts that had all-out elections, there were eight districts that made three appearances out of five possible chances. These districts were East Yorkshire, Fenland, Holderness, Mendip, Middlesbrough, New Forest, South Kesteven and West Somerset.

The analysis of the nine districts at the top of the table from a geographical perspective does not seem to indicate any pattern. What we do find, however, are a district each from Hampshire (Havant) and Surrey (Runnymede). This is surprising because we found in the table illustrating the districts with a number of appearances in the top 20 (Table 4.12), that there were two districts each from these county councils (Eastleigh and Winchester from Hampshire and Tandridge and Mole Valley from Surrey). Tables 4.12 and 4.13 show that while Havant made seven appearances in the bottom 20 turnout rates of districts over all the elections, another district from Hampshire, Winchester, made nine appearances at the top end of the table of turnout rates. The level of turnout is often assumed to be consistent across local government, we would, therefore, expect to find relatively constant rates of turnout within the area of a county. Our results show that the variation in turnout is so wide in local government, that it makes it difficult to come to any conclusions from average figures.

We noticed in London and the metropolitan boroughs, that the boroughs which appeared a number of times at the bottom end of the turnout table, were local authorities that were completely dominated by the Labour party with a few exceptions. The relationship is not as strong in the districts, as only two of the top nine districts in Table 4.13 have always been controlled by the Labour party, namely Stoke-on-Trent and Kingston-upon-Hull. In addition, Runnymede has been controlled by the Conservative party between 1973 and 1992. The other districts have changed their political colour a number of times. For example, Barrow-in-Furness has been controlled by the Labour party on nine occasions, the

Conservatives on one occasion and has been under no overall control for two terms. We can, therefore, tentatively conclude that the political situation of the districts may not be such an important variable in explaining low levels of turnout, as it is in the other two types of local authorities.

Table 4.13: The number of times a shire district appears in the bottom 20 district turnout rates between 1973 and 1992 (fourteen elections).

District	Number of appearances in the bottom 20	Political control of district (terms of office)
Stoke-on-Trent	12	Lab (12)
Hartlepool	11	Lab (11) NOC (2)
Kingston-upon-Hull	10	Lab (10)
Hereford	8	Lib Dem (10) NOC (2)
Havant	7	Con (8) NOC (5)
Thamesdown	7	Lab (12) NOC (1)
Barrow-in-Furness	6	Lab (9) NOC (2) Con (1)
Huntingdon	6	Con (12) NOC (1)
Runneymede	6	Con (13)
Hart	5	NOC (8) Ind (3) Con (2)
Wokingham	5	Con (11) NOC (1)
Broxbourne	4	Con (13)
Broadland	3	Con (11) NOC (1)
Crewe and Nantwich	3	NOC (8) Lab (4)
East Yorkshire	3	Con (2) Ind (2) NOC (1)
Ellesmere Port and Neston	3	Lab (13)
Fareham	3	NOC (11) Con (2)
Fenland	3	Con (4) NOC (1)
Gillingham	3	Con (8) NOC (4)
Great Grimsby	3	Lab (7) NOC (3) Con (1)
Holderness	3	Ind (5)
Ipswich	3	Lab (11) Con (1)
Mendip	3	NOC (3) Con (1) Ind (1)
Middlesborough	3	Lab (5)
New Forest	3	Con (3) Ind (1) NOC (1)
Oadby and Wigston	3	Con (10) Lib Dem (1)
Penwith	3	Ind (6) NOC (6)
Purbeck	3	Ind (6) NOC (6)
Redditch	3	Lab (9) Con (1)
South Cambridgeshire	3	Ind (12) NOC (1)
Southend-on-Sea	3	Con (10) NOC (3)
South Kesteven	3	NOC (3) Con (2)
Tamworth	3	Lab (7) Con (4) NOC (2)
West Lindsey	3	NOC (9) Ind (2) Lib Dem (1)
West Somerset	3	Ind (5)

Table 4.13: cont:

District	Number of appearances in the bottom 20	Political control of district (terms of office)
Worthing	3	Con (9) NOC (1)
Aylesbury Vale	2	Con (2) NOC (2) Ind (1)
Basingstoke and Deane	2	Con (9) NOC (4)
Burnley	2	Lab (13)
Carlisle	2	Lab (9) NOC (1)
Carrick	2	Ind (2) NOC (2) Lib Dem (1)
Cleethorpes	2	NOC (5)
Derwentside	2	Lab (5)
Epping Forest	2	Con (12)
Glanford	2	Con (2) Ind (2) NOC (1)
Great Yarmouth	2	NOC (5) Con (4) Lab (3)
Hastings	2	NOC (11) Con (1)
Milton Keynes	2	NOC (8) Con (3) Lab (2)
North Cornwall	2	Ind (5)
North Kesteven	2	Ind (3) NOC (2)
Nuneaton and Bedworth	2	Lab (12)
Reigate and Banstead	2	Con (10) NOC (2)
Richmondshire	2	Ind (5)
Rushmoor	2	Con (10) NOC (2)
Rutland	2	Ind (3) NOC (2)
Scunthorpe	2	Lab (12)
Shrewsbury and Atcham	2	NOC (11) Con (2)
Staffordshire Moorlands	2	NOC (4) Ind (1)
Torquay	2	Con (7) Lib Dem (1) NOC (1)
Tunbridge Wells	2	Con (13)
Adur	1	Lib Dem (8) NOC (4)
Amber Valley	1	Lab (8) Con (2) NOC (2)
Bassetlaw	1	Lab (11) NOC (1)
Beverley	1	Con (3) Ind (1) NOC (1)
Blackburn	1	Lab (6) NOC (6)
Blyth Valley	1	Lab (3) Lib Dem (1) NOC (1)
Boothferry	1	Ind (2) NOC (2) Con (1)
Cambridge	1	NOC (6) Lab (5) Con (2)
Cannock Chase	1	Lab (9) NOC (4)
Caradon	1	Ind (5)
Castle Point	1	Con (4) Lab (1)
Cherwell	1	Con (11) NOC (1)
Christchurch	1	Con (5)
Colchester	1	NOC (7) Con (6)
Congleton	1	NOC (7) Con (5) Lib Dem (1)
Corby	1	Lab (4) Con (1)
Derby	1	Lab (7) Con (3) NOC (2)
East Dorset	1	Con (4) Ind (1)
East Hampshire	1	Con (3) NOC (2)
East Lindsey	1	Ind (5)
Epson and Ewell	1	Ind (5)

Table 4.13: cont:

District	Number of appearances in the bottom 20	Political control of district (terms of office)
Gosport	1	Con (8) Lib Dem (2) Lab (1) NOC (1)
Harrogate	1	Con (7) NOC (3)
Kettering	1	NOC (4) Con (1)
Melton	1	Con (5)
Mid Bedfordshire	1	Con (4) NOC (1)
Newcastle-under-Lyme	1	Lab (10) NOC (2)
Nottingham	1	Lab (3) Con (2)
Peterborough	1	NOC (10) Lab (2) Con (1)
Portsmouth	1	Con (7) NOC (3)
Preston	1	Lab (11) Con (2)
Salisbury	1	NOC (3) Con (2)
Scarborough	1	NOC (4) Con (1)
Sedgefield	1	Lab (5)
Shepway	1	Con (3) Lib Dem (1) NOC (1)
Slough	1	Lab (9) Con (1)
Southampton	1	Lab (7) Con (4) NOC (1)
South Bedfordshire	1	Con (12) NOC (1)
South Buckinghamshire	1	Con (5)
South Herefordshire	1	Ind (12)
Stockton-on-Tees	1	Lab (3) Con (1) NOC (1)
Teesdale	1	Ind (5)
Thanet	1	Con (3) Ind (1) NOC (1)
Vale Royal	1	NOC (4) Lab (1)
Wealden	1	Con (5)
Wear Valley	1	Lab (3) Lib Dem (1) NOC (1)
West Devon	1	Ind (4) NOC (1)
West Dorset	1	Ind (5) NOC (2)
West Lancashire	1	Con (9) NOC (4)
West Oxfordshire	1	NOC (6) Con (3) Ind (3)
West Wiltshire	1	Con (2) NOC (2) Lib Dem (1)
Woodspring	1	Con (9)
Wrekin	1	Lab (5)

(Where the Alliance have won control of a borough, their term(s) of office have been grouped together with the Liberal Democrats).

The final area of investigation in the shire districts is to compare the districts in Tables 4.12 and 4.13 to discover whether there are any districts that appear in both tables. The results show that there are seventeen districts that appear in the list of the districts with a top 20 turnout rate in one election and a bottom 20 turnout rate in another election. About a third of these districts have only one appearance in each table, the others have a number of appearances at one end of the scale and then a turnout in one election that puts it at the other

end of the scale. Burnley is one of the exceptions to this rule. We have mentioned above that this district appears in the top 20 of district turnout rates in 1978, 1980 and 1984 and has been under the control of the Labour party throughout its history. To this, we can add that the turnout in Burnley places it in the bottom 20 in the elections of 1991 and 1992. We asked representatives from the council if they could explain this change in the level of turnout over time, but they did not realise that such a situation existed and once informed could not provide us with any insight.

Taking into account the small number of districts that have both high and low levels of turnout over time, we can still generally conclude that a district will produce consistent levels of turnout relative to the turnout in other districts. A correlation matrix between turnout in elections, similar to the ones produced for the London and metropolitan boroughs can not be carried out for this type of local government, because there is no consistency to the number of cases that we have to analyse by year. We would not, therefore, be comparing like with like.

4.5: Conclusions.

We have shown in this chapter how the level of voter participation varies within the three types of local authority studied: the London boroughs, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts. This variation has been investigated in three specific areas. We have examined the average turnout of all local authorities in every year of the data-set. We have compared average turnout rates between local authorities and finally, we have compared the turnout in individual boroughs in individual years in an attempt to spot outliers. In each type of local authority, we have endeavoured to explain why the turnout was high in an election and/or within a particular council.

General conclusions that can be reached at this early stage of analysis are that the level of turnout appears to be stable over the elections in our data-set, hovering around the 40% mark

across local government. Turnout rates in an election significantly above this average seem to be dependent upon whether there is an important national political consideration. This can take the form of an issue such as the poll tax or when the election takes place in relation to a timing of a general election. By examining the turnout in the individual local authorities we have shown that people participate more in elections in some councils than in others. Some of these places have a history of 'deviant' levels of turnout, while there are often times when a council has a 'one-off' level of turnout that may be the result of a local factor. There now needs to be further analysis so we are able to explain the reasons for turnout to be higher in one local authority than in another. This will be achieved by investigating whether the important variables that determine the level of turnout are political, structural, socio-economic or a combination of all three types.

Chapter 5: Investigation of the determinants of turnout at the local authority level.

5.1: Introduction.

Chapter 4 demonstrated how the level of turnout can vary over time and between local authorities. The next step in the analysis is to investigate the possible determinants of this variation in turnout. There are three main types of explanatory variables, political, structural and socio-economic. We will begin by examining whether any structural and/or political variables are influential in determining the level of local election turnout, before we study the potential importance of the socio-economic variables.

5.2: The relationships between political/structural variables in the London boroughs and the level of turnout.

In order to ascertain how the level of turnout varies according to the size of the electorate in a local authority (ELECT), electorates in the London boroughs were split into a number of categories and the rates of turnout compared across the different size groupings in nine elections. We have stated in our earlier hypotheses (section 3.7) that the smaller any electoral area, the higher the resulting level of turnout. The results in Table 5.1 show that it is only in the two earliest elections of 1964 and 1968 and the election in 1990, that the turnout is highest in the category containing the smallest sized boroughs. When the average rates of turnout are compared, we find that just over one percentage point separates the figures across the different size categories. On behalf of a potential voter, a vote in a London borough that contains less than 125,000 people is deemed to be as important as a vote in a borough that has more than 225,000 registered people. This is not a particularly surprising result to find, because it is unlikely that the size of the electorate in a borough will be an important consideration for an elector in deciding whether or not to vote in a ward election.

Table 5.1: The relationship between the size of the electorate in the London boroughs and the level of turnout.

	Less than 125,000	125,000 -175,000	175,001 -225,000	More than 225,000
1964	37.7 (3)	34.3 (15)	35.2 (13)	25.7 (1)
1968	35.0 (4)	34.4 (17)		33.3 (11)
1971	34.7 (4)	37.2 (14)	36.6 (11)	37.7 (3)
1974	29.6 (4)	35.0 (15)	32.3 (11)	39.0 (2)
1978	36.9 (7)	40.1 (13)	38.7 (10)	40.4 (2)
1982	39.1 (7)	39.5 (14)	41.1 (9)	42.0 (2)
1986	41.5 (8)	41.9 (12)	42.1 (10)	41.7 (2)
1990	45.6 (8)	43.4 (13)	44.9 (9)	44.8 (2)
1994	45.2 (10)	46.3 (13)	44.8 (7)	46.4 (2)
Mean	38.4 (55)	39.1 (126)	39.5 (80)	39.0 (27)

(The figures in the brackets are the numbers belonging to each category).

The next variable to test was the average size of ward electorates in the London boroughs. This variable (WRATIO) was calculated by dividing the electorate of a borough by the number of wards in a borough. We expected that if the electorate size of a local government area was going to be important, the average size of wards would be more relevant to a potential voter than the number of people in a borough. The results in Table 5.2 indicate that there continues to be no relationship between a variable measuring size and the percentage of people voting in local elections. It is true that, on average, turnout is lowest in those largest sized wards ('More than 9,000') but the relationship is not very consistent. In 1964 the wards with an average electorate of more than 9,000 people had the lowest turnout of all the categories with a figure of 30.2%, but in 1974 these 'large-sized' wards had the highest turnout of 35.8%.

Table 5.2: The relationship between the average number of electors in wards in the London boroughs and the level of turnout.

	Less than 2,000	2,000 -5,000	5,001 -7,000	7,001 -9,000	More than 9,000
1964	33.7 (7)	42.9 (2)	32.4 (6)	37.1 (12)	30.2 (5)
1968	35.0 (6)	29.5 (3)	38.8 (5)	34.5 (13)	29.9 (5)
1971	36.5 (8)	33.2 (3)	40.9 (5)	36.3 (11)	35.8 (5)
1974	35.1 (8)	28.7 (2)	34.4 (9)	31.8 (9)	35.8 (4)
1978	40.3 (1)	43.4 (2)	38.1 (16)	39.1 (12)	41.5 (1)
1982	39.9 (1)	40.8 (3)	38.7 (16)	41.7 (12)	
1986	38.8 (1)	44.2 (3)	41.3 (18)	41.8 (7)	44.0 (3)
1990	45.9 (1)	46.5 (6)	42.3 (14)	46.0 (11)	
1994		45.2 (6)	45.9 (13)	45.7 (12)	45.2 (1)
Mean	38.2 (33)	39.4 (30)	39.2 (102)	39.3 (99)	37.5 (24)

The final part of the analysis into the potential relationship between size and the level of turnout in the London boroughs, is to examine the rate of turnout according to the average number of electors per councillor in a ward. This variable (CRATIO) was calculated by dividing the electorate in a borough by the number of councillors in the borough. As was the case with the other two variables measuring the size of the electorate, we expected size to be inversely related to the rate of turnout. The results in Table 5.3 reveal that the average number of electors per councillor in a ward does not seem to influence the level of local election turnout. The average turnout figures are actually lowest in the category containing the smallest elector:councillor ratios, which is a finding completely opposed to our hypothesis. Perhaps, it is difficult to find any relationship between these two variables, because the elector:councillor ratio in London is confined within a relatively tight band of figures.

Table 5.3: The relationship between the ratio of electors per councillor in the London boroughs and the level of turnout.

	Less than 2,000	2,000 -2,300	2,301 -2,600	2,601 -3,000	More than 3,000
1964	28.5 (2)	38.7 (11)	29.5 (7)	38.0 (6)	32.4 (6)
1968	32.3 (4)	36.1 (11)	29.4 (6)	36.6 (6)	33.5 (5)
1971	36.6 (3)	35.5 (10)	39.0 (5)	35.3 (7)	38.3 (7)
1974	32.8 (6)	32.6 (9)	35.7 (5)	33.1 (7)	35.4 (5)
1978		36.0 (7)	42.4 (9)	38.0 (11)	39.2 (5)
1982	35.5 (1)	37.9 (6)	42.7 (9)	38.9 (12)	41.9 (4)
1986	36.4 (1)	41.1 (8)	42.7 (7)	41.8 (10)	43.0 (6)
1990	47.4 (4)	45.4 (7)	44.2 (6)	42.0 (10)	46.3 (5)
1994	44.5 (3)	46.3 (8)	45.7 (9)	44.8 (8)	46.9 (4)
Mean	36.8 (24)	38.8 (77)	39.0 (63)	38.7 (77)	39.7 (47)

The first political variable we studied in the London boroughs is the effect on turnout according to which party comprised the largest political grouping on the council at the previous election. We expected to find higher levels of turnout where the Conservatives were the largest party rather than any other major parties. As the Conservatives were the party of government from 1979 to 1997, then this is likely to have provoked continued support from their loyal supporters and high turnout in boroughs where they were strong. Newton supports this proposal with his research which showed that, 'turnout is highest in safe Conservative wards' (safe being defined as a majority of between 5-9%) (1972:252). The Conservative party can also be very effective in mobilising their supporters to vote regardless of the political situation. On the other hand, it is thought that some proportion of Labour supporters will not bother to vote if Labour are very strong in an area, because they do not see their involvement as being important in deciding the outcome of the election.

The relationship between the variable measuring the largest party and turnout was investigated for every election. The results in Table 5.4 show that between 1964 and 1994, turnout was always higher when the largest party in the council was the Conservatives rather than the Labour party. Our hypothesis was confirmed because the average turnout in those

areas where the Conservatives are the strongest party is exactly five percentage points more than when the largest party was Labour. Turnout is very high in those boroughs where the Liberal Democrats were the largest party in the previous elections of 1986 and 1990. This indicates that party campaigning by the Liberal Democrats may have been successful, because where the party is strong, turnout is high. The level of turnout was also high in the 'No party label' category. This category contains those boroughs where two parties had the equal highest number of councillors. This is the most marginal political position a borough can be in, so this situation may have influenced a proportion of people to vote in what was likely to be a close contest again. There are only a handful of cases in the two categories of 'Lib Dems' and 'No party label'. We should, therefore, be careful about making any generalisations from the results.

Table 5.4: Turnout by largest party at the previous election: London boroughs.

	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dems	No party label
1964	38.4 (11)	32.3 (20)		43.4 (1)
1968	35.7 (10)	33.1 (21)		37.8 (1)
1971	37.7 (29)	26.8 (3)		
1974	38.2 (10)	31.6 (22)		
1978	40.7 (14)	37.6 (18)		
1982	42.8 (16)	36.8 (15)		45.1 (1)
1986	42.5 (16)	40.2 (15)		56.2 (1)
1990	46.4 (12)	42.0 (17)	50.6 (3)	
1994	46.2 (15)	43.6 (14)	52.4 (3)	
Mean	41.0 (133)	36.0 (145)	51.5 (6)	45.6 (4)

(In the 1964 election, the turnout rate was not compared to the political situation of the previous election, but used the party that had the largest group of councillors in this election).

The next stage in the analysis of turnout at the London borough level was to perform some correlations. This will enable us to summarise the strength of a linear relationship between turnout and the range of political and structural variables. The dependent variable, turnout, should not be correlated to the independent variables in its aggregated form, (i.e. the addition of the voting rate over all years and in all the boroughs), because this would mean that we are comparing results of many different turnout figures with the same number of different

values for each independent variable. The way to get over this problem is to correlate turnout with all the political and structural variables in each election.

Before carrying out the correlations, we shall construct some hypotheses. The variable NOCOUN, which is defined as, 'The number of councillors belonging to the largest group in the council in the previous election', can be used to form one hypothesis. Another potentially important and related variable to test was the influence of marginality. The variable MARG, was defined as 'The proportion of the total number of council seats held by the largest party in the last election'. We expected to find negative relationships between both these variables and the level of turnout, as these two variables are surrogate indicators of marginality. The higher the number or proportion of councillors belonging to the majority party in the previous election, the safer the borough.

The results in Table 5.5 show that these two variables were the only political or structural variables out of a total of twelve that consistently produced a number of significant correlation coefficients. NOCOUN produced an average 'r' figure of -.48 over the nine elections (1964-1994). The square of this average correlation coefficient provides us with a figure for the variation in the dependent variable which can be explained by the variation in this independent variable. The r^2 figure for this variable was 23%. Similarly, the correlations between MARG and turnout produced negative coefficients that were significant at the .01 level in seven elections. Overall, the variable produced an r^2 figure of 26%.

The only other political or structural variable to achieve any significant correlation coefficients was POPD ('population density' - measured by the number of people per hectare in a local authority). There was a negative relationship between this variable and turnout in four out of the five elections between 1964 and 1978. This means that as population density increases, turnout will tend to decrease. The average correlation coefficient for this variable over all the elections was -.32, which produces a r^2 figure of 10%. It seems, however, that the importance of this variable in influencing turnout is declining over time. It was at its

peak in the first election in the data set in 1964 with a correlation of -.49, but has fallen at a steady rate since to -.19 in 1986 when it was not significant at the 5% level. The correlation coefficients produced for the variables that measured the influence of the electorate size, ELECT, WRATIO and CRATIO never exceeded +/- .12. The figures seem surprisingly low, but were nevertheless expected after the initial investigations into the relationships between the variables measuring size and turnout (see Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3).

Table 5.5: Correlation coefficients produced between the political/structural variables and turnout in the London boroughs (1964-1994).

	NOCOUN	POPD	MARG
1964	-.68	-.49	-.67
1968	-.59	-.43	-.58
1974	-.68	-.42	-.70
1978	-.58	-.36	-.56
1982	-.43		-.53
1990	-.51		-.45
1994	-.43		-.37

(All the variables that achieved any significant correlation coefficients at the 5% level or better are included in the table. No significant correlation coefficients were produced in 1971 and 1986).

5.3: The relationships between political/structural variables in the metropolitan boroughs and the level of turnout.

Following the template of analysis set out in the London boroughs, the same hypotheses that were tested in London will also be examined in the metropolitan boroughs. We are interested in determining the relative importance of the political and structural variables as explanatory variables of turnout across local government.

To begin, we shall investigate the influence of the size of the electorate in a metropolitan borough (ELECT) as a determinant of the level of turnout. Restating our hypothesis, the smaller any electoral area, the higher the resulting level of turnout. The results in Table 5.6 show that the size of a metropolitan borough seems to have little effect on the level of

turnout. The average turnout for the different size categories only vary by one percentage point between the smallest and largest bands (39.3% versus 38.3%) and the higher of the two figures came from the bigger size grouping ('More than 250,000').

Table 5.6: The relationship between the size of the electorate in the metropolitan boroughs and the level of turnout.

	Less than 150,000	150,000 -200,000	200,001 -250,000	More than 250,000
1973	30.8 (7)	31.0 (12)	30.2 (9)	31.0 (8)
1975	32.7 (6)	31.9 (12)	32.6 (10)	32.0 (8)
1976	36.6 (6)	38.0 (12)	36.9 (10)	37.7 (8)
1978	37.2 (6)	37.5 (12)	36.1 (10)	36.0 (8)
1980	35.8 (6)	37.5 (12)	34.7 (10)	36.9 (8)
1982	37.4 (6)	37.7 (12)	35.3 (10)	37.8 (8)
1983	40.4 (6)	41.9 (12)	40.0 (10)	42.5 (8)
1984	38.4 (5)	38.0 (13)	36.8 (10)	41.3 (8)
1986	39.5 (5)	39.1 (13)	38.1 (10)	41.9 (8)
1987	43.4 (5)	44.0 (13)	42.4 (10)	46.1 (8)
1988	39.4 (5)	39.9 (13)	37.5 (10)	41.7 (8)
1990	48.3 (5)	47.3 (12)	44.8 (11)	49.1 (8)
1991	41.0 (5)	41.2 (12)	39.5 (11)	41.7 (8)
1992	33.9 (5)	33.1 (12)	30.6 (11)	33.4 (8)
1994	40.0 (5)	40.0 (13)	36.8 (10)	39.7 (8)
Mean	38.3 (83)	38.5 (185)	36.8 (152)	39.3 (120)

The next variable to examine is the effect of the average number of electors in a ward (WRATIO) upon the level of turnout. We have hypothesised that turnout will be higher in smaller wards rather than larger ones, because a single vote will be more powerful in deciding the outcome in a ward with a small electorate. The results in Table 5.7 indicate that the hypothesis can be refuted. The highest average level of turnout appeared in wards that had an average electorate between 10,001 and 12,000 people. This level of turnout was nearly three percentage points higher than the average turnout in the smallest sized wards. No relationship was found in the London boroughs either, so it looks as if there is a pattern across the types of local authorities studied so far.

Table 5.7: The relationship between the average number of electors in wards in the metropolitan boroughs and the level of turnout.

	Less than 8,000	8,000 -9,000	9,001 -10,000	10,001 -12,000	More than 12,000
1973	30.2 (6)	30.9 (10)	29.1 (9)	35.0 (6)	29.0 (5)
1975	33.0 (6)	34.2 (8)	28.6 (10)	35.4 (7)	31.1 (5)
1976	37.3 (5)	38.4 (9)	34.5 (9)	39.4 (8)	37.3 (5)
1978	37.0 (5)	36.2 (10)	38.0 (6)	37.0 (10)	35.5 (5)
1980	35.9 (6)	37.0 (10)	33.6 (6)	38.1 (9)	35.5 (5)
1982	34.8 (7)	39.4 (8)	35.2 (8)	38.2 (9)	36.9 (4)
1983	39.5 (7)	42.5 (8)	40.2 (8)	42.3 (9)	41.7 (4)
1984	37.0 (7)	38.9 (8)	36.2 (8)	41.8 (9)	37.4 (4)
1986	38.0 (7)	40.5 (7)	38.0 (10)	42.4 (8)	38.2 (4)
1987	42.2 (7)	44.8 (8)	41.4 (8)	47.0 (9)	43.4 (4)
1988	37.7 (7)	41.0 (8)	38.9 (10)	42.3 (7)	37.2 (4)
1990	45.2 (7)	47.9 (8)	46.2 (8)	49.0 (9)	46.2 (4)
1991	40.5 (9)	40.4 (6)	40.2 (8)	42.3 (8)	40.1 (5)
1992	32.4 (9)	32.1 (6)	31.7 (8)	33.9 (8)	32.3 (5)
1994	39.4 (9)	38.7 (6)	38.0 (9)	39.6 (7)	39.7 (5)
Mean	37.3 (104)	38.9 (120)	36.7 (125)	40.2 (123)	37.4 (68)

The final structural variable to investigate was the importance of the average elector:councillor ratio (CRATIO) as a possible determinant of voter participation. As all wards in the metropolitan boroughs have three members, then the elector:councillor ratio will be calculated by dividing the electorate figure by three in every instance. We have already found that the size of the electorate in a metropolitan borough does not seem to be important variable, we can deduce from this that the elector:councillor ratio will be similarly unimportant. Our conclusion from this analysis of structural variables in the metropolitan boroughs is that they do not seem to provide any relationships with the level of turnout.

The final part of this preliminary analysis into the determinants of turnout at the metropolitan borough level before we conduct correlations, is to examine whether turnout varies according to the largest party on the council at the last election. The results in the metropolitan boroughs show that the pattern encountered for London is continued. Table

5.8 shows that, on average, turnout is more than four percentage points higher when the Conservatives were the largest party in a borough in the last election rather than the Labour party. The highest average turnout occurred when two parties had exactly the same number of councillors in the previous election ('No party label'). This suggests that turnout may be higher when there is some uncertainty over the party that will control the council. We should, however, be cautious of these figures because there are only five cases of this occurrence in the data-set.

Table 5.8: Turnout by largest party at the previous election: Metropolitan boroughs.

	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dems	No party label
1973	35.7 (8)	29.5 (27)	25.7 (1)	
1975	37.2 (8)	30.9 (27)	28.3 (1)	
1976	40.1 (10)	36.5 (25)	32.2 (1)	
1978	36.5 (20)	37.0 (16)		
1980	38.9 (15)	34.4 (21)		
1982	42.2 (7)	35.7 (29)		
1983	44.0 (8)	40.3 (27)		45.1 (1)
1984	40.9 (9)	37.7 (27)		
1986	43.2 (7)	38.6 (29)		
1987	46.1 (4)	43.7 (32)		
1988	40.3 (3)	39.0 (31)		47.7 (2)
1990	51.5 (3)	46.1 (31)	54.1 (1)	55.9 (1)
1991	45.1 (1)	40.4 (34)	49.7 (1)	
1992	39.4 (2)	31.8 (33)	41.5 (1)	
1994	44.0 (3)	38.3 (31)	46.0 (1)	40.6 (1)
Mean	41.7 (108)	37.3 (420)	39.6 (7)	47.3 (5)

(In the 1973 election, the turnout rate was not compared to the political situation of the previous election, but used the party that had the largest group of councillors in this election).

The final stage of the analysis in this section is to conduct correlations to test the strength of the relationship between the political/structural variables and turnout. The same set of variables were used in the metropolitan boroughs as in London, which enables us to make direct comparisons between the results.

We have hypothesised that there will be a negative relationship between NOCOUN and turnout at the local authority level. The results of the correlations in Table 5.9 show that

NOCOUN was the only variable to produce a number of significant coefficients. The variable produced significant negative correlations in every election of the study, with an average 'r' figure of -.53. The square of this figure gives the amount of variation in the dependent variable, explained by this independent variable. NOCOUN, therefore, explains on average over a quarter of the variance between the two variables. The variable which measured marginality (MARG) produced negative correlations with turnout in every election. They ranged between -.1 in 1984, to -.7 in 1994, which was the only time the correlation coefficient was significant at the 5% level or better.

Two further observations can be made from the results of the correlation analysis. The first is that there was a significant correlation between the variable POPD and turnout in 1973. Population density was found to be a more important variable in the more densely populated London boroughs. In the metropolitan boroughs, the average number of people per hectare was nearly 20, which is about 30 fewer than in the same area in London. The second point from the correlations was that in accordance with the earlier findings in Tables 5.6 and 5.7, the effect of size on the level of turnout does not seem to be an influential determinant. The variables, ELECT, CRATIO and WRATIO could only produce a strongest correlation coefficient of -.21 in 1978, .17 (in 1983 and 1984), and .17 (in 1983 and 1984) respectively. Overall, the results of the correlations between turnout and the range of political and structural variables in the metropolitan boroughs seems to indicate that they will probably not be important determinants when all the independent variables are considered together.

Table 5.9: Correlation coefficients produced between the political/structural variables and turnout in the metropolitan boroughs (1973-1994).

	NOCOUN	POPD	MARG
1973	-.59	-.36	
1975	-.62		
1976	-.30		
1978	-.38		
1980	-.37		
1982	-.54		
1983	-.56		
1984	-.35		
1986	-.50		
1987	-.36		
1988	-.54		
1990	-.69		
1991	-.75		
1992	-.75		
1994	-.68		-.70

(All the variables that achieved any significant correlation coefficients at the 5% level or better are included in the table).

5.4: The relationships between political/structural variables in the shire districts and the level of turnout.

The analysis in London and the metropolitan boroughs has shown that the three structural variables measuring the size of the electorate have little impact on the level of turnout. It is likely that these variables will be more important in the shire districts, because of the smaller sized councils compared to London and the metropolitan boroughs.

The electorate in the shire districts (ELECT) was recoded into categories and the level of turnout compared across the various groupings. The results in Table 5.10 show that the level of turnout is always lowest in districts that have an electorate greater than 95,000 people, with the exception of the 1987 election when turnout is exactly the same in the 'Less than 50,000' category. The average rates of turnout vary by a small margin of just over three percentage points, but this is still a relationship that was not found in London or in the metropolitan boroughs. Perhaps the reasoning for this could be that it is harder for the

biggest sized districts to engender a sense of belonging to their local council. The same problem could exist in London and the metropolitan boroughs. The largest size category in London was 'More than 225,000' electors and in the metropolitan boroughs, 'More than 250,000' people. The corresponding figure in the districts was a much smaller, 'More than 95,000' people. It seems that it is only in the districts that the size of the electorate is small enough for there to be some essence of 'community'.

Table 5.10: The relationship between the size of the electorate in the shire districts and the level of turnout.

	Less than 50,000	50,000 -65,000	65,001 -80,000	80,001 -95,000	More than 95,000
1973	33.5 (80)	33.9 (84)	33.6 (74)	33.5 (32)	29.1 (26)
1976	37.2 (75)	38.7 (80)	37.6 (77)	38.2 (34)	35.4 (30)
1978	42.1 (15)	40.5 (18)	39.5 (5)	40.5 (4)	36.2 (2)
1980	39.6 (32)	39.7 (36)	39.2 (13)	38.4 (15)	35.6 (7)
1982	42.1 (31)	41.8 (34)	42.4 (16)	40.7 (14)	37.1 (8)
1983	41.8 (69)	41.7 (77)	41.8 (72)	42.2 (37)	40.8 (41)
1984	40.4 (29)	41.6 (39)	40.9 (23)	38.6 (17)	38.0 (14)
1986	42.7 (29)	42.2 (39)	42.5 (19)	40.1 (22)	39.0 (13)
1987	43.6 (65)	44.7 (70)	45.3 (70)	44.8 (45)	43.6 (46)
1988	42.1 (27)	41.8 (34)	40.6 (22)	39.8 (18)	39.4 (16)
1990	49.6 (27)	49.1 (35)	49.4 (22)	49.1 (15)	45.7 (17)
1991	42.6 (63)	43.3 (68)	43.0 (70)	42.7 (49)	41.7 (46)
1992	39.7 (25)	39.6 (29)	37.8 (26)	36.9 (16)	36.1 (17)
Mean	41.3 (567)	41.4 (643)	41.0 (509)	40.4 (318)	38.3 (283)

The next step was to examine the impact of the average number of electors in a ward (WRATIO) on the level of turnout. The number of electors per ward are very similar throughout the English councils, as exactly half of the districts have between 2,000-4,000 electors in a ward. The results in Table 5.11 seem to suggest a weak link between this ratio and the level of turnout, as the numbers participating in the election decline when a ward has an average electorate of more than 5,000 people. This relationship was not apparent in London and the metropolitan boroughs, hence, there must be something special about the districts.

The most obvious explanation for the different results found between these types of local authorities are the differences in the average number of people in the wards. In London, the size categories varied between 'Less than 2,000' and 'More than 9,000'. In the metropolitan boroughs, the boundaries were between 'Less than 8,000' and 'More than 12,000'. In the districts, the categories containing the average number of electors in a ward were between 'Less than 2,000' and 'More than 5,000'. It would have been ideal to have had the same size categories in all types of local authorities to enable easy comparison of the respective levels of turnout. Of course, this was not possible because the size of electoral units in the districts are much smaller than those in London and the metropolitan boroughs. Hence, there is a great deal of variation in the size of electorates across local government, and the small size of the electorate does appear to be an important determinant of turnout. The lower the average number of electors in a district ward the higher the level of turnout

Table 5.11: The relationship between the average number of electors in wards in the shire districts and the level of turnout.

	Less than 2,000	2,000 -3,000	3,001 -4,000	4,001 -5,000	More than 5,000
1973	35.7 (58)	33.9 (94)	33.2 (57)	32.4 (31)	30.2 (56)
1976	37.6 (58)	38.2 (100)	38.3 (62)	36.9 (28)	36.0 (48)
1978		39.8 (5)	41.7 (22)	41.4 (11)	36.7 (6)
1980	42.1 (5)	38.3 (10)	39.2 (43)	39.6 (22)	38.3 (23)
1982	45.5 (5)	41.1 (14)	42.3 (33)	40.9 (26)	40.4 (25)
1983	39.8 (52)	40.1 (85)	43.4 (77)	43.6 (39)	42.1 (43)
1984	43.8 (4)	39.6 (8)	41.0 (40)	40.7 (35)	39.1 (35)
1986	44.4 (4)	41.0 (10)	43.3 (37)	41.1 (36)	40.4 (35)
1987	43.2 (44)	43.2 (85)	45.5 (78)	46.1 (43)	44.7 (46)
1988	43.4 (3)	41.1 (5)	41.8 (41)	41.5 (31)	39.6 (37)
1990	50.3 (4)	47.7 (8)	50.1 (34)	49.5 (32)	47.1 (38)
1991	41.7 (37)	42.0 (89)	43.9 (82)	43.7 (37)	42.2 (51)
1992	41.5 (3)	41.1 (7)	39.8 (34)	38.0 (31)	36.4 (38)
Mean	42.4 (277)	40.5 (520)	41.8 (640)	41.2 (402)	39.5 (481)

The final structural determinant of local election turnout to test is the average number of electors per councillor (CRATIO). Table 5.12 shows that the level of turnout seems to decline when the elector:councillor ratio is more than 2,000 people and falls at a more significant rate when the elector:councillor ratio is more than 3,000. Turnout was lowest in the category containing an average elector:councillor ratio of more than 3,000 people in every election except 1978 and 1980. The comparison of the average turnout rates illustrates that turnout is at its highest when the elector:councillor ratio is at its smallest (less than 1,000:1), but there is very little difference between the average turnout rates in the first three categories. On average, turnout is over five percentage points lower in the 'More than 3,000' category than at the other end of the elector:councillor scale ('Less than 1,000').

Table 5.12: The relationship between the ratio of electors per councillor in the shire districts and the level of turnout.

	Less than 1,000	1,000 -1,400	1,401 -2,000	2,001 -3,000	More than 3,000
1973	35.9 (24)	33.6 (166)	32.9 (82)	30.4 (19)	26.7 (5)
1976	38.9 (20)	37.5 (156)	38.0 (94)	36.7 (20)	34.5 (6)
1978	39.8 (5)	41.4 (27)	40.4 (10)	35.5 (1)	36.9 (1)
1980	39.3 (17)	39.3 (46)	40.1 (32)	33.8 (5)	34.5 (3)
1982	42.2 (19)	42.1 (41)	41.4 (33)	38.8 (7)	35.2 (3)
1983	42.4 (24)	41.6 (122)	41.8 (112)	41.3 (30)	39.5 (8)
1984	40.2 (16)	40.8 (47)	41.1 (40)	38.9 (13)	35.4 (6)
1986	43.0 (14)	43.0 (47)	40.9 (42)	40.6 (14)	34.7 (5)
1987	44.9 (23)	44.8 (105)	44.2 (126)	44.1 (33)	43.0 (9)
1988	42.4 (9)	41.7 (45)	40.9 (44)	40.4 (14)	34.9 (5)
1990	49.2 (11)	49.8 (46)	48.4 (39)	48.3 (15)	43.7 (5)
1991	43.9 (24)	43.6 (90)	42.2 (140)	42.2 (32)	40.7 (10)
1992	40.4 (11)	39.4 (41)	37.3 43)	38.8 (13)	31.8 (5)
Mean	41.7 (217)	41.4 (979)	40.7 (837)	39.2 (216)	36.3 (71)

The analysis of the structural variables in the districts shows that large sized districts produce the lowest levels of turnout and wards with the smallest average electorates and the lowest average elector:councillor ratios provide the highest levels of turnout. Similar relationships

Another political/structural variable that may be a determinant of turnout in a district is the electoral cycle that a district uses. It is hypothesised that turnout will be higher in all-out elections rather than thirds for a number of reasons. The first is that the electorate may believe that their vote is more important because of the whole council being involved. Secondly, because this method of holding elections is a simple system, elections are held once every four years, then there is little reason for the electorate to be apathetic because they do not understand what elections they are voting in. Finally, it is argued that too frequent elections may cause a decline in local political interest. It is hard enough for local party election organisers to stir up any public involvement in local politics, let alone consistent interest in elections that take place in three consecutive years. Contrary to the arguments outlined above, however, is the argument that, 'party competition in 'thirds' councils tends to be more vigorous than in 'all-out' authorities' (Rallings and Thrasher, 1994b:17). This would, therefore, counterbalance the previous hypothesis, as an increase in party competition is expected to increase the level of turnout. The results show that voter participation is highest in unequal third elections at 43.1%, while the average level of turnout is 41.7% in equal thirds. The turnout is at its lowest in all-out elections, producing an average turnout figure of 38.2%.

The final stage of the analysis into the political and structural determinants of turnout in the districts is to conduct some correlation analysis. A total of twelve political and structural variables were correlated with the dependent variable, turnout. The correlations in London and the metropolitan boroughs showed that NOCOUN was the variable that produced the largest number of significant correlation coefficients. In the districts, Table 5.14 shows that the variables does not seem to be as influential. It is significant in ten elections out of thirteen, but its average correlation is only -.23, while its highest figure is equivalent to the average figure in the metropolitan boroughs (-.52). Of course, what is important is that we are finding consistent negative correlations between NOCOUN and turnout. The size of the coefficients are of secondary importance to us. All we can say at this early stage of analysis is that the correlation coefficients help to confirm or disprove hypotheses that have been

suggested. They cannot on their own, constitute firm evidence of a relationship between variables. The variable that was constructed for marginality (MARG) also produced a number of significant correlations at the .01% level. The coefficients were always negative as expected, and its average correlation figure was -.22 which provides us with an r^2 of 5%.

In London, the variable (POPD) measuring population density was negatively correlated to turnout in four out of the nine elections. In the metropolitan boroughs, the same variable produced only one negative significant correlation. This rather mixed pattern is continued in the results for the shire districts, as the variable is significant on five occasions, but the sign of the coefficients are not consistent. The coefficients are positive in the all-out elections of 1983 and 1987 indicating that there is a tendency for turnout to increase as population density increases, but there does not seem to be a simple explanation for these results.

The representative ratios CRATIO, WRATIO and the components that made them up, ELECT and COUNC, all have small correlations with turnout. For instance, CRATIO always provided a small negative relationship with turnout. Its highest correlation was -.29 in 1986, and it produced an average coefficient of -.19 over the nineteen year period. These results are to be expected after the earlier preliminary analysis in Table 5.12, which suggested that there did seem to be a relationship between this variable and the level of turnout.

Table 5.14: Correlation coefficients produced between the political/structural variables and turnout in the shire districts (1973-1992).

	COUNC	CRATIO	ELECT	MARG	NOCOUN	POPD	TWDS	WRATIO
1973		-.22	-.18	-.27	-.26	-.19	.28	-.35
1976				-.27	-.27			-.17
1980			-.20	-.25	-.23			
1982		-.28	-.25					-.28
1983				-.21	-.12	.15	-.29	.13
1984		-.25	-.25	-.35	-.30			.27
1986		-.29	-.26	-.28	-.20	-.19		-.28
1987	.12			-.24		.12	-.19	.13
1988		-.23	-.25	-.43	-.40			-.23
1990		-.25	-.27	-.36	-.31	-.20		-.26
1991	.12	-.14		-.23	-.22		-.15	
1992		-.26	-.31		-.52			-.25

(All the variables that achieved any significant correlation coefficients at the 5% level or better are included in the table. No significant correlation coefficients were produced in 1978).

These correlations confirm the direction of the relationships between some of our independent variables and turnout. We can conclude that the two variables measuring marginality (NOCOUN and MARG) are inversely related to turnout - the safer the contest, the lower the turnout. We can also state that the smaller the size of the electorate in the districts, the smaller the average size of wards and the smaller the elector:councillor ratio, the higher the level of turnout.

Investigation of the socio-economic determinants of turnout in the London boroughs.

5.5: Introduction.

We have shown in sections 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 that there is some evidence of relationships between the political/structural variables and the level of turnout. This section concentrates on the socio-economic variables as potential determinants of turnout. There are a total of 22 socio-economic variables in the data-set that have been selected from the 1981 and the 1991 censuses. These socio-economic variables have been defined in section 3.8. The variation

in local election turnout can be explained by finding the reasons why, for example, a very high proportion of people vote in a particular local authority. It seems reasonable, therefore, before testing hypotheses and conducting correlation analysis, to provide the average socio-economic make-up of local authorities so we have a yardstick against which the high turnout local authorities can be compared. We have data from two censuses in our data-set which enables us to analyse the social composition of a type of local authority and see how the structure in local authorities has changed over ten years.

Table 5.15 shows that there are five identical variables that appear in both the censuses. The previous Conservative government may argue that the changes to the mean figures for some of these variables are a direct result of their policy initiatives. For example, the Conservative party placed great emphasis in their 1979 general election campaign on the case that Labour's policy on employment was not working. According to the 1981 census figures, unemployment in London (measured by the percentage of economically active men without work) was running at more than 10%. Table 5.15 indicates that the level of unemployment in the London boroughs has fallen by five percentage points between the two dates of the census.

Secondly, the change in the mean figures for the variables that measure the housing structure in London (COUN81/91 and OWN81/91) may be the result of the Conservative government's policy to give people the right to buy their council house. In 1981, the average percentage of households in the London boroughs which were council tenants was 31.7%. The figures from the 1991 census show that this percentage has fallen to 24%. The percentage of households which are homes owners has increased by a slightly higher margin than the number of council tenants fell by, from a base of 47.3% in 1981 to 56.4% in 1991. We should not infer from this that the same households have just swapped from being council tenants to being home owners, because there are a number of other factors which need to be taken into consideration. Such factors could include the state of the housing market during the ten years resulting in more people buying houses instead of privately

renting. Also, an explanation for the council housing figure to decrease independently of the proportion of home owners increasing, is that newly sold council houses have not been replaced by new council housing stock.

Table 5.15: The change in the census variables over time in the London boroughs.

Variable	Mean	S. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
COUN81	31.7	17.4	13.0	82.0
COUN91	24.0	13.8	9.4	58.3
NOCAR81	45.6	12.9	28.8	67.4
NOCAR91	41.1	12.6	24.4	61.4
OWN81	47.3	20.5	4.6	74.7
OWN91	56.4	18.1	23.2	78.8
PENS81	18.0	1.5	15.1	20.9
PENS91	16.8	1.7	13.8	20.6
UNEMP81	10.6	3.9	5.5	19.2
UNEMP91	5.6	2.9	0.7	9.4

(The figures in the table above are all in percentages).

5.6: The relationships between the socio-economic variables in the London boroughs and the level of turnout.

The first step in our analysis of the socio-economic variables is to suggest some hypotheses that can be investigated by simple bivariate methods. We will then go on to test these possible relationships and the influence of other socio-economic variables. We shall begin by investigating the type of housing in a local authority as a possible determinant of turnout. We have two sets of housing variables whose influence upon turnout can be tested. These variables measure the percentage of households in a borough which are council tenants (COUN81 and COUN91) and those that own their own home (OWN81 and OWN91). Our hypothesis is that we would expect an inverse relationship between council housing and turnout. The higher the proportion of council tenants in a borough, the lower the level of turnout. Similarly, we would expect a positive relationship between the proportion of home

owners in a borough and turnout. The higher the percentage of owner occupiers in a borough, the higher the level of turnout. These hypotheses have been made in the light of previous studies of turnout which have found that lower socio-economic status (SES) is associated with lower turnout, and council housing can be a surrogate indicator of low SES (Rallings and Thrasher, 1990).

As elections in London are held every four years and we are only using the 1981 census for elections between 1978 and 1985, then there are only five elections that can be analysed. Two of these elections use the 1981 census figures and three use data from 1991. The first socio-economic variable to study was council housing. The variable COUN81 was recoded into categories that were the same for both censuses. We have illustrated how some of the census variables have changed over time, this means that the number of cases belonging to the categories will change when the different census figures are used. For example, if we examine the 'n' numbers in the 'Less than 20%' category, we can see that there are eighteen cases in the 1981 census which belong to this grouping (nine in 1978 and in 1982). According to the 1991 census, there are now 48 cases that fall into this category (sixteen in 1986, 1990 and 1994). The next step was to compare the level of turnout according to the different proportions of council tenants living in a London borough.

Table 5.16 shows quite clearly that the average turnout rate drops off substantially when more than 30% of households in a London borough are council tenants. Turnout is nearly eight percentage points higher in boroughs that have less than 20% of households which are council tenants, compared to boroughs that have more than 40% of their households in this type of housing.

Table 5.16: Analysis of the rate of turnout according to the percentage of households in the London boroughs which are council tenants.

1981 Census	Less than 20%	20%-30%	30.1%-40%	More than 40%
1978	41.5 (9)	42.1 (12)	36.2 (3)	32.5 (8)
1982	42.9 (9)	42.4 (12)	37.7 (3)	34.2 (8)
1991 Census	Less than 20%	20%-30%	30.1%-40%	More than 40%
1986	43.2 (16)	43.9 (6)	41.5 (5)	36.5 (5)
1990	46.7 (16)	47.3 (6)	40.9 (5)	37.5 (5)
1994	47.7 (16)	45.8 (6)	42.5 (5)	42.0 (5)
Mean	44.4 (66)	44.3 (42)	39.8 (21)	36.5 (31)

The second socio-economic variable to test was the relationship between the percentage of households in a borough which are home owners and the level of turnout. We have previously hypothesised that a positive relationship is expected between these variables. Table 5.17 shows that the average rate of turnout increased in gradual steps as the percentage of home owners increased. Where home owners made up less than 20% of the population in London boroughs, the average turnout rate was 30.8%. This compares to a average turnout of 45.2% in boroughs that had home owners making up more than 65% of their population. This simple bivariate analysis suggests that the relationships between these two variables may be important, but it needs further investigation.

Table 5.17: Analysis of the rate of turnout according to the percentage of households in the London boroughs which are home owners.

1981 Census	Less than 20%	20%-45%	45.1%-65%	More than 65%
1978	29.8 (4)	36.1 (11)	43.7 (9)	42.4 (8)
1982	31.7 (4)	38.0 (11)	43.5 (9)	43.1 (8)
1991 Census	Less than 20%	20%-45%	45.1%-65%	More than 65%
1986		39.5 (9)	41.4 (10)	43.9 (13)
1990		41.6 (9)	42.4 (10)	48.1 (13)
1994		43.1 (9)	44.3 (10)	48.5 (13)
Mean	30.8 (8)	39.7 (49)	43.1 (48)	45.2 (55)

The final socio-economic variable that we can analyse to gauge its effect on turnout are the socio-economic groupings. It was decided to examine the turnout at the two extremes of these groupings. This means that we will compare turnout rates when boroughs have a very high proportion of SEG1's (more than 7% of households) to the levels of turnout produced when boroughs have a large percentage of SEG5's (more than 6% of households). We have hypothesised in section 3.8 that we would expect to find higher levels of turnout in those boroughs that have a large proportion of their electorate belonging to the SEG1 category, rather than the SEG5 grouping. The results confirmed the hypothesis because the level of turnout was more than five percentage points higher in those boroughs with a large proportion of people in the SEG1 category rather than in SEG5.

The next step in determining the importance of socio-economic variables relative to the variation in local election turnout, is to correlate turnout with the variables from the two censuses. This will enable us to identify the direction and strength of the relationships and will indicate which variables are likely to be significant enough to enter into the regression equation. This regression analysis is carried out in the final sections of this chapter.

Correlations between the socio-economic variables and turnout in the London boroughs can be carried out in five elections between 1978 and 1994. The results of this analysis in Table 5.18 show that the housing variables seem to be important influences upon the level of turnout. The variables measuring the proportion of council tenants in a borough (COUN81/91) produced five significant correlation coefficients, which were all negative in direction. The variable signifying home ownership in 1981 and 1991 produced positive coefficients of similar magnitude in four out of the five elections. A final observation from Table 5.18 is that variables such as NOCAR81/91 and UNEMP81 produced negative correlations with turnout in every election. This is to be expected because these variables can be used to measure the relative prosperity of an area, hence, in boroughs where the values for these variables are high, turnout is likely to be low.

Tables 5.18: Correlation coefficients produced between the socio-economic variables and turnout in the London boroughs (1978-1994).

	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994
COUN81	-.68	-.69			
NOCAR81	-.67	-.60			
OWN81	.67	.62			
UNEMP81	-.73	-.68			
CENT91					.48
COUN91			-.41	-.59	-.41
NOCAR91			-.40	-.57	-.50
OVER91			-.54	-.58	
OWN91				.52	.46
PENS91				.43	
SEG1			.51	.46	
SEG2			.54	.54	
SEG3N			-.37		
SEG4			-.59	-.67	-.41
SEG5			-.53	-.65	-.48
SELF91				.49	
TWOCAR91			.40	.58	.52
WHITE91			.39	.51	

(All the variables which achieved any significant correlation coefficients at the 5% level or better are included in the table).

Investigation of the socio-economic determinants of turnout in the metropolitan boroughs.

5.7: Introduction.

We noticed in section 5.5 by examining a number of variables from the censuses, how the social composition of society has changed over ten years in the London boroughs. Table 5.19 shows that we can detect similar patterns of change in the metropolitan boroughs. For example, the census figures show that the percentage of households which are council tenants has declined by nearly ten percentage points from 36.6% in 1981 to 26.7% in 1991. The percentage of households which are home owners in the metropolitan boroughs has increased by exactly the same margin over the time period.

Other important changes to the social composition of the metropolitan boroughs include the unemployment rate falling by nearly three percentage points between 1981 and 1991. According to the 1991 census, the percentage of unemployment in this type of local authority is more than double the rate in the London boroughs. Table 5.19 also shows that there is now a larger proportion of the electorate who are of pensionable age, going up from 16.9% in 1981 to 18.4% in 1991. The percentage of the population belonging to this category in London was found to be declining. The different social make-up of London and the metropolitan boroughs that has been highlighted, may help to explain why turnout levels are higher or lower in a particular borough at a given time.

Table 5.19: The change in the census variables over time in the metropolitan boroughs.

Variable	Mean	S. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
COUN81	36.6	11.5	18.6	63.6
COUN91	26.7	8.0	13.5	39.6
NOCAR81	47.5	7.6	27.0	61.8
NOCAR91	41.4	7.7	24.0	56.9
OWN81	53.2	11.7	31.4	71.4
OWN91	63.3	9.0	41.2	77.8
PENS81	16.9	1.7	12.0	19.9
PENS91	18.4	1.3	15.5	20.9
UNEMP81	15.5	4.0	9.4	27.4
UNEMP91	12.6	5.4	7.4	21.8

(The figures in the table above are all in percentages).

5.8: The relationships between the socio-economic variables in the metropolitan boroughs and the level of turnout .

The first hypothesis to test in the metropolitan boroughs is to see if the percentage of council tenants in a borough has any impact on the rate of turnout. In London, we found quite a strongly inverse relationship between these two variables. We expected to find a similar finding in the metropolitan boroughs, because the socio-economic make-up of London and the metropolitan boroughs are comparable.

The results in Table 5.20 show that there does seem to be a relationship between the two variables, as the rate of turnout falls as the percentage of households in a borough which are council tenants increases. In every election, the turnout rate is always higher in the category containing the lowest proportions of council tenants in a borough. On average, turnout is nearly seven percentage points higher in the 'Less than 25%' category, than it is in the 'More than 45%' grouping. This finding is similar in magnitude to the range of nearly eight percentage points found between the equivalent categories in the London boroughs.

Table 5.20: Analysis of the rate of turnout according to the percentage of households in the metropolitan boroughs which are council tenants.

1981 Census	Less than 25%	25%-35%	35.1%-45%	More than 45%
1978	38.1 (8)	37.4 (8)	36.5 (11)	35.3 (9)
1980	39.9 (8)	36.3 (8)	35.7 (11)	33.8 (9)
1982		36.8 (8)	36.6 (11)	33.8 (9)
1983	44.7 (8)	41.3 (8)	41.0 (11)	38.5 (9)
1984	41.7 (8)	38.0 (8)	38.7 (11)	35.6 (9)
1991 Census	Less than 25%	25%-35%	35.1%-45%	More than 45%
1986	41.4 (14)	39.3 (15)	36.1 (7)	
1987	45.9 (14)	44.1 (15)	39.7 (7)	
1988	41.3 (14)	39.5 (15)	36.4 (7)	
1990	50.1 (14)	46.2 (15)	43.0 (7)	
1991	44.0 (14)	39.7 (15)	36.6 (7)	
1992	36.0 (14)	31.6 (15)	27.4 (7)	
1994	41.6 (14)	38.7 (15)	34.7 (7)	
Mean	42.2 (138)	39.1 (145)	36.9 (104)	35.4 (45)

The relationship between the percentage of households which are home owners in the metropolitan boroughs and the level of turnout was the next area of inquiry. We have suggested that there will be a positive relationship between the two variables, the higher the proportion of home owners in a borough, the higher level of turnout will result. Table 5.21 confirms this hypothesis to be correct. When the two extremes of our categories are compared, we can see that turnout is more than six percentage points higher in boroughs that are made up of more than 65% home owners, than the turnout in boroughs which fall into the 'Less than 40%' category. This finding is not particular surprising considering the results that were obtained between council tenants and turnout in the metropolitan boroughs and the figures found from the analysis in London.

Table 5.21: Analysis of the rate of turnout according to the percentage of households in the metropolitan boroughs which are home owners.

1981 Census	Less than 40%	40%-50%	50.1%-65%	More than 65%
1978	35.2 (6)	36.2 (10)	36.9 (11)	38.1 (9)
1980	33.4 (6)	35.1 (10)	36.4 (11)	39.5 (9)
1982	33.3 (6)	36.1 (10)	36.6 (11)	44.4 (9)
1983	37.9 (6)	40.6 (10)	41.2 (11)	44.4 (9)
1984	35.6 (6)	38.1 (10)	38.1 (11)	38.8 (9)
1991 Census	Less than 40%	40%-50%	50.1%-65%	More than 65%
1986		40.0 (2)	38.3 (17)	40.6 (17)
1987		45.2 (2)	42.6 (17)	45.1 (17)
1988		43.5 (2)	37.9 (17)	40.9 (17)
1990		43.8 (2)	45.6 (17)	48.9 (17)
1991		40.1 (2)	38.8 (17)	42.9 (17)
1992		29.9 (2)	30.4 (17)	35.0 (17)
1994		35.5 (2)	37.7 (17)	40.8 (17)
Mean	35.1 (30)	38.7 (64)	38.4 (174)	41.6 (164)

The final hypothesis to test in this section uses the socio-economic groupings. The two extremes of a persons socio-economic group (SEG1 and SEG5) were used as potential determinants of the rate of local election turnout. We expected to find higher levels of turnout in those boroughs that had a large proportion of their population classed in the SEG1 group. The two socio-economic groupings were recoded and the level of turnout was analysed according to each variable in all elections after 1986. The results of our analysis show that in those boroughs that have more than 7% of households belonging to the SEG1 group, the level of turnout was 43.1%. A turnout figure of 38.5% was produced in those boroughs which had more than 6% of their households belonging to the SEG5 category. Turnout is, therefore, more than four percentage points lower for boroughs with high proportions of SEG5, than the turnout in boroughs with a high proportion belonging to the SEG1 grouping.

The next part of the analysis is to carry out correlations between all the socio-economic variables and turnout. This will provide statistical support to the suggested relationships between a number of socio-economic variables and turnout that have been examined in this section. The results of the correlations between the 1981 census variables and turnout in elections between 1978 and 1985 can be seen in Table 5.22. Five variables produced at least one significant correlation coefficient. The 'r-values' were in their expected relational direction to turnout when we take into account the results from previous research into the determinants of turnout. Milbrath and Goel (1977) for example, found that income is an influential factor. OWN81 and UNEMP81 are both surrogate indicators of income, so we would expect a positive and negative relationship respectively. The variables, OWN81 and UNEMP81 both have relatively strong coefficients that are in the right direction in each of their three appearances.

Tables 5.22: Correlation coefficients produced between the socio-economic variables and turnout in the metropolitan boroughs (1978-1984).

	1978	1980	1982	1983	1984
COUN81	-.39	-.58	-.60	-.63	-.25
NOCAR81		-.23	-.47		-.15
OWN81	.39	.54		.37	
PENS81		.37			
UNEMP81	-.55		-.41		-.16

(All the variables which achieved any significant correlation coefficients at the 5% level or better are included in the table).

Table 5.23 uses the variables from the 1991 census to correlate with turnout in elections after 1985. The variables, OWN91, UNEMP91 and COUN91 continue their relationships as before and all the socio-economic groupings produce a number of significant coefficients. Overall, the results of the socio-economic correlations are quite strong and consistent with the results found in London. For example, the variables measuring unemployment and having no access to a car, continue to show powerful negative correlations with turnout. The bivariate statistical techniques used in this chapter provide us with some preliminary

ideas as to what the important determinants of turnout will be, before we go on using more sophisticated methods.

Tables 5.23: Correlation coefficients produced between the socio-economic variables and turnout in the metropolitan boroughs (1986-1994).

	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
COUN91	-.54	-.58	-.46	-.60	-.65	-.60	-.61
MIGRPER						.39	
NOCAR91				-.40	-.43	-.45	-.53
OWN91	.34	.40		.51	.55	.54	.59
SEG1	.44	.54	.46	.52	.57	.47	.48
SEG2	.57	.64	.55	.71	.71	.64	.64
SEG3M	-.55	-.64	-.55	-.49	-.49	-.39	
SEG3N	.48	.49	.48	.47	.45	.35	
SEG4	-.52	-.54	-.52	-.67	-.64	-.55	-.59
SEG5				-.50	-.56	-.62	
SELF91	.46	.56	.52	.62	.61	.65	.60
TWOCAR91				.40	.45	.48	.52
UNEMP91				-.46	-.50	-.46	-.54

(All the variables which achieved any significant correlation coefficients at the 5% level or better are included in the table).

Investigation of the socio-economic determinants of turnout in the shire districts.

5.9: Introduction.

The pattern of analysis in this chapter is to begin by determining how a number of census variables have changed their values over time. A summary of the social composition of the districts enables us to compare the results between the different types of local authorities, and provides us with some background to help explain some of the variation in turnout.

Table 5.24 shows that, on average, the percentage of households in the districts which are council tenants has fallen by nine percentage points to 16.3% between the two censuses of 1981 and 1991. A similar fall in the value of this variable was also found in London and the metropolitan boroughs, but its base is more than eleven percentage points lower in the

districts than the corresponding figure for the metropolitan boroughs and more than six percentage points lower than in London. While the percentage of council house tenants in the districts has declined over time, the percentage of households which now own their own homes has increased by nearly ten percentage points. Again, the shire districts show their relative level of prosperity by having nearly 16% more households which are home owners compared to the figure in the London boroughs and nearly 9% more than the figure in the metropolitan boroughs (1991 census). The level of unemployment has fallen slightly in the districts and there is a trend for fewer households to have no access to a car. There is also evidence of a greater proportion of the electorate being of pensionable age (women - 60 or over, and men - 65 or over) in the districts in 1991, than there were ten years ago. This result was also found in the metropolitan boroughs, but not in London. We would expect the figures for the percentages of pensioners to increase in every sphere of local government, because it reflects the advance of modern health technology which results in people now generally living longer lives.

Table 5.24: The change in the census variables over time in the shire districts.

Variable	Mean	S. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
COUN81	25.3	10.3	9.4	74.9
COUN91	16.3	6.9	2.7	46.1
NOCAR81	32.2	8.9	14.6	57.4
NOCAR91	26.3	8.0	11.3	51.2
OWN81	62.4	9.7	23.4	84.8
OWN91	72.2	7.0	46.9	89.4
PENS81	17.8	4.4	9.8	35.3
PENS91	19.2	3.7	11.7	34.6
UNEMP81	9.1	3.8	3.7	30.0
UNEMP91	7.8	2.5	3.6	17.2

(The figures in the table above are all in percentages).

5.10: The relationships between the socio-economic variables in the shire districts and the level of turnout.

The first step in our investigations of the socio-economic variables as determinants of turnout in the shire districts, is to examine whether there if there is a relationship between the percentage of council tenants in a borough and turnout. Table 5.25 indicates that the relationship between these two variables does not seem to be as strong in the districts as it was in London and the metropolitan boroughs. Although, the average rate of turnout falls as the percentage of households which are council tenants increases, it does so by only a small margin. There is a range of just over three percentage points between the turnout figures in the 'Less than 20% category' (42.5%) and the 'More than 35%' group (39.1%). This is less than half the range found in the two other types of local authorities.

Table 5.25: Analysis of the rate of turnout according to the percentage of households in the shire districts which are council tenants.

1981 Census	Less than 20%	20%-25%	25.1%-35%	More than 35%
1978	42.4 (13)	39.3 (12)	42.2 (10)	38.7 (9)
1980	39.9 (30)	38.3 (29)	39.4 (29)	38.7 (15)
1982	42.7 (30)	41.4 (29)	41.2 (29)	39.6 (15)
1983	41.4 (95)	41.9 (92)	41.6 (70)	41.7 (39)
1984	40.5 (35)	40.2 (36)	41.3 (32)	38.8 (19)
1991 Census	Less than 20%	20%-25%	25.1%-35%	More than 35%
1986	42.4 (88)	40.1 (22)	39.4 (9)	37.9 (3)
1987	44.6 (232)	44.2 (35)	43.4 (23)	42.3 (6)
1988	41.4 (85)	40.8 (21)	38.9 (8)	36.4 (3)
1990	49.3 (84)	48.1 (21)	47.1 (8)	43.9 (3)
1991	43.1 (232)	42.2 (35)	41.3 (23)	38.5 (6)
1992	39.4 (81)	35.6 (21)	36.4 (8)	33.7 (3)
Mean	42.5 (1005)	41.1 (353)	41.1 (274)	39.1 (121)

The next hypothesis to test is the relationship between the variable measuring the proportion of home owners in the districts and turnout. The results in Table 5.26 show an upward pattern of turnout as the percentage of home owners in a borough increases. The average rates of turnout between all the categories only varies by just over two percentage points, which is quite a small amount of deviation.

Table 5.26: Analysis of the rate of turnout according to the percentage of households in the shire districts which are home owners.

1981 Census	Less than 55%	55%-65%	65.1%-70%	More than 70%
1978	39.8 (6)	40.0 (19)	42.1 (9)	41.4 (10)
1980	39.5 (18)	38.5 (44)	39.7 (21)	39.5 (20)
1982	40.7 (18)	40.9 (44)	42.9 (21)	42.1 (20)
1983	41.5 (55)	41.8 (120)	41.5 (62)	41.8 (59)
1984	40.4 (23)	40.3 (52)	40.5 (24)	40.2 (52)
1991 Census	Less than 55%	55%-65%	65.1%-70%	More than 70%
1986	38.3 (3)	41.4 (16)	40.8 (22)	42.1 (87)
1987	42.9 (7)	44.0 (31)	43.5 (51)	44.8 (207)
1988	37.6 (3)	41.8 (15)	40.5 (21)	41.2 (78)
1990	45.0 (3)	48.6 (15)	47.2 (21)	49.4 (77)
1991	41.0 (7)	41.6 (31)	41.5 (51)	43.2 (207)
1992	34.7 (3)	37.0 (15)	37.1 (21)	39.1 (74)
Mean	40.1 (146)	41.4 (402)	41.6 (324)	42.3 (891)

The final socio-economic variable to test was the rate of turnout according to the percentages belonging to the SEG1 and SEG5. Using the same criteria of comparison set out in London and the metropolitan boroughs, we compared the turnout in those districts that had more than 7% of households belonging to the SEG1 group, against the turnout in the districts which had more than 6% of households in the SEG5 group. As we have previously hypothesised, our expectation is to find higher levels of turnout coming from the SEG1 group. The results confirm this hypothesis but only by a small margin. On average, a turnout of 41.9% was produced in those districts with a high proportion of SEG1's, compared to a turnout of

40.9% in the districts with a high proportion of unskilled workers (SEG5). Perhaps the reason for this finding was because there are many more districts that have a SEG1 figure of more than 7% than there are London or metropolitan boroughs which do. Hence, in the districts we may not be examining the turnout rates of those districts in the upper tier of the range of SEG1 figures. To remedy this potential problem, we changed the limits of the variable to examine the turnout in those districts that had more than 13% of households in the SEG1 category. The results show a very similar turnout rate as before. We can conclude from this that the SEG's do not seem to be as powerful determinants of turnout in the districts, as they were in London and the metropolitan boroughs.

We can only suggest what relationships are likely to be important by examining how the level of turnout varies with regard to another variable. The analysis carried out so far in this section does not necessarily prove anything but suggests that we give particular variables further consideration as they may prove to be statistically significant. The next step, therefore, is to conduct some correlation analysis between the socio-economic variables and the dependent variable, turnout.

The results in Tables 5.27 and 5.28 show that there is some consistency to the variables that seem to have relationships with turnout. The two measures of unemployment in this study, UNEMP81 and UNEMP91, produced significant results in a majority of elections in the districts as they did in London and the metropolitan boroughs. Their correlation coefficients in the districts were always negatively related to turnout, implying that the higher the proportion of the electorate in a borough unemployed, the lower the level of turnout in that district. On the other hand, there is also some variation in the importance of the socio-economic variables according to the type of local authority. For example, in London and the metropolitan boroughs, the variable measuring the proportion of council tenants produced significant negative correlation coefficients in every election and the variable measuring the percentage of home owners also produced a number of significant correlation coefficients. In the districts, however, the percentage of council tenants in a borough only gave one

significant result in 1992 of -.25, while OWN91 was only slightly more important with three significant correlation coefficients in 1990 (.21) 1991 (.13) and 1992 (.21). The correlations between OWN81 and turnout did not produce any significant results.

Table 5.27: Correlation coefficients produced between the socio-economic variables and turnout in the shire districts (1978-1983).

	1978	1980	1982	1983
NCWP81	.38			.16
NOCAR81			-.24	
PENS81	.32	.21		-.15
UNEMP81			-.37	-.12

(All the variables which achieved any significant correlation coefficients at the 5% level or better are included in the table).

The six socio-economic groupings produced powerful correlation coefficients with turnout in elections using the 1991 census data. SEG1 (average of .32), SEG2 (.31), and SEG3M (-.32) for example, were each significant at the .01 level in all six elections and the sign of their coefficients are as expected. The only other variable that featured a number of times in Tables 5.27 and 5.28 was the variable signifying the proportion of people of pensionable age, PENS81 and PENS91. PENS81 had significant correlations with turnout in three out of four elections, however, on one of these occasions the coefficient was negative. This means that it is either a rogue result, or as the coefficients are not very high, then this variable may not prove to be very influential in future analyses.

Table 5.28: Correlation coefficients produced between the socio-economic variables and turnout in the shire districts (1986-1992).

	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992
COUN91						-.25
CENT91		.15				-.20
MIGRPER		.12				
NOCAR91	-.18					-.28
OVER91				-.22		-.23
OWN91				.21	.13	.21
PENS91	.23		.23			.33
SEG1	.36	.36	.27	.23	.30	.39
SEG2	.40	.22	.24	.30	.23	.49
SEG3M	-.41	-.27	-.28	-.24	-.26	-.46
SEG3N	.18	.27			.23	.24
SEG4	-.34	-.26		-.20	-.23	-.46
SEG5		-.15			-.13	-.33
SELF91	.35			.32		.46
TWOCAR91	.18					.26
UNEMP91	-.35	-.15	-.24	-.22	-.16	-.40

(All the variables which achieved any significant correlation coefficients at the 5% level or better are included in the table).

5.11: Multivariate analysis of turnout at the local authority level: an introduction.

Having separately examined the importance of both the political and structural variables and the socio-economic variables, the next stage of the analysis of turnout at the local authority level is to assess all the potential determinants of turnout together. A technique that is used to examine a number of variables together, and can separate the important ones from the others, is called multivariate analysis. In this analysis, we employ a widely used method called multiple regression with the stepwise option. The variable that has the highest statistical correlation with the dependent variable is placed into the equation first, and then each subsequent independent variable with progressively lower correlations are added.

The stepwise procedure is used in this analysis in three ways. Firstly, the political and structural variables are tested on their own and the results are analysed. Then, as it is impossible to understand and explain turnout variation in local elections without a careful

examination of the social characteristics of the electorate, the stepwise method is used to analyse the separate effect of the socio-economic variables. Finally, the political, structural and the socio-economic variables are considered in the regression together. The idea behind these two separate examinations of the different types of variables was so we can see the effect of each type of variable on the dependent variable, turnout, before combining all possible determinants in an attempt to increase the amount of variation explained by the regression equation.

The regression analysis was carried out for every election. We know from the results of our correlations which variable would be added first, as this is the variable with the highest correlation with the dependent variable. After this first step, we are interested in seeing what happens to the significance of the other variables once a variable has been successfully added into the equation. We also want to discover how much of the variance in turnout can be explained by a combination of a few variables. We shall discuss how the r^2 value changes over time and how the results compare across the different types of local authorities.

5.12: Multivariate analysis of turnout in the London boroughs.

The political and structural variables were examined first. The results in Table 5.29 show that with three exceptions, between the elections of 1964 and 1994, only one variable was successfully added in each election. In 1971 and 1986, no variables were significant enough to enter into the regression equation, and in 1982, MARG and POPD were both added into the equation, bringing the r^2 value up to 44%.

The results of the regressions show that the political variables seem to be more successful determinants of turnout than the structural variables. NOCOUN was the most important variable in the London boroughs. It entered into the equation the most number of times with five appearances. Overall, the political and structural variables explained a level of r^2 that varied between a low of 18% in 1994, to a high of 49% in 1974. In this latter regression

equation the variable measuring marginality (MARG) explained nearly half of the variation in turnout on its own. Of the elections where variables were successfully entered into the regression equation, the average value of r^2 was 33%.

Table 5.29: Explaining the variation in turnout using the political and structural variables in the London boroughs*.

	1964	1968	1974	1978	1982	1990	1994
NOCOUN	-.68	-.59		-.58		-.51	-.43
MARG			-.70		-.60		
POPD					-.41		
Constant	64.8	58.6	59.7	58.2	65.8	58.4	55.4
r^2 (%)	**46**	**35**	**49**	**34**	**44**	**26**	**18**

* (The figures in the body of this table are the standardised regression coefficients. They give the number of standard deviation change on the dependent variable, turnout, that will be produced by a change of one standard deviation on the independent variable concerned).

We would expect after finding strong correlation coefficients in the London boroughs between the variables derived from the census and turnout, that the socio-economic variables have the potential to be more important determinants of turnout than the political and structural variables. There is no census data available from 1964 to 1974, so we use the 1981 and 1991 censuses for the elections held between 1978 and 1994. The results in Table 5.30 show that in 1978, 1982, 1990 and 1994, only the variable with the highest significant correlation coefficient was entered into the regression equation. Over the five elections, the coefficient of determination (r^2) varied between 27% in 1994 to 53% in 1978. The best regression equation was produced when over half of the variation in turnout was explained when the UNEMP81 variable entered into the regression equation in 1978. The socio-economic variables explained an average r^2 of 43%, which is ten percentage points higher than the figure produced using just the political and structural variables.

Table 5.30: Explaining the variation in turnout using the socio-economic variables in the London boroughs.

	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994
UNEMP81	-.73				
COUN81		-.69			
SEG4			-.99	-.67	
SELF91			-.50		
TWOCAR91					.52
Constant	52.6	47.6	75.2	57.1	40.1
r^2 (%)	53	47	44	45	27

Finally, the three types of explanatory variables were examined in a regression analysis together. Over the five elections, six different variables were added into the equation, three of these variables were only incorporated once in an equation. The findings indicate that the socio-economic variables seemed to be the most important determinants of turnout in the London boroughs as five out of the six variables in Table 5.31 belonged to this category. The only political variable, NOCOUN, however, continued to be important as it entered into the regression equation the most number of times. The r^2 figures over the sixteen year period, ranged from a low of 27% in 1994 to 63% in 1982. Using the election of 1982 as an example, the first variable to enter the equation in this year was COUN81 explaining 47% of the variation in turnout. The second variable to enter was NOCOUN that added another 9% to the r^2 figure. Finally, the addition of the variable NOCAR81, brought the r^2 figure up to 63%. We can conclude from the results in Table 5.31 that the following factors lead to low levels of turnout in a London borough: dominant one party control (NOCOUN), high unemployment (UNEMP81), high levels of council housing (COUN81/91) and indicators of income in a borough such as having no access to a car (NOCAR81).

Table 5.31: Explaining the variation in turnout using all the independent variables in the London boroughs.

	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994
UNEMP81	-.73				
COUN81		-.32			
NOCOUN		-.39	-.30	-.40	
NOCAR81		-.41			
SEG4			-.58	-.60	
TWOCAR91					.52
Constant	52.6	65.5	59.9	66.6	40.1
r^2 (%)	**53**	**63**	**44**	**61**	**27**

5.12.1: The analysis of the residuals in the London boroughs.

The next area of examination following on from the multiple regression analysis, is to investigate the London boroughs that had levels of turnout especially higher or lower than that predicted by the regression equations. These cases are known as the outliers. To qualify as an outlier, a borough must have a turnout rate in an election more than one standard deviation above or below their predicted level of turnout. Table 5.32 shows that there are ten boroughs that appear in the list of outliers more than once. Richmond-upon-Thames had a higher turnout than was predicted by the regression equation in every election, while Barking and Dagenham and Kensington and Chelsea had a turnout more than one standard deviation below their predicted level in four out of the five elections. It is surprising to find a borough (Brent) that appeared in both the 'above' and 'below' columns. In 1990, Brent produced a level of turnout that made it a negative outlier and then in 1978 the borough produced a turnout which made it a positive outlier. The regression analysis can only go so far in explaining the variation in turnout, because there are many variables that can not be measured and put into the regression equation. By examining the results at the ward level of persistent residual boroughs such as Richmond-upon-Thames, Barking and Dagenham and Kensington and Chelsea and the 'one-off' residual boroughs such as

Brent and Barnet, and carrying out qualitative research, we will perhaps be able to uncover additional explanatory variables.

Table 5.32: London boroughs with 'deviant' levels of turnout in elections between 1978 and 1994 (five elections).

Above	Number of elections	Below	Number of elections
Richmond-upon-Thames	5	Barking and Dagenham	4
Greenwich	3	Kensington and Chelsea	4
Wandsworth	3	Newham	3
Hammersmith and Fulham	2	Croydon	2
Hillingdon	2	Havering	2
Brent	1	Barnet	1
Camden	1	Bexley	1
Ealing	1	Brent	1
Kingston-upon-Thames	1	Harrow	1
Sutton	1	Lewisham	1
Tower Hamlets	1	Southwark	1
		Waltham Forest	1

5.13: Multivariate analysis of turnout in the metropolitan boroughs.

Following the pattern of analysis set out in the London boroughs, a regression analysis was conducted using the political and structural variables in every election between 1973 and 1994. Our correlations in section 5.3 (Table 5.9) have shown that apart from two instances, NOCOUN was the only political or structural variable to have significant correlations with the dependent variable, turnout. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in Table 5.33 that NOCOUN seems to be the most important variable in explaining the variation in turnout in the metropolitan boroughs. The variable entered into the regression in every election apart from 1994 and 1976 when no variables were entered.

A total of five variables were successfully entered into the regression equations over the 21 year period. Apart from NOCOUN, the only other variable that entered into the regression equation a number of times was TWDS. The r^2 figures ranged from 13% in 1987 to 74% in

1991. In this latter election, NOCOUN entered first into the regression equation and explained 57% of the variation in turnout. The variable measuring the total number of wards in a borough (TWDS) explained an additional seventeen percentage points when it entered the equation as the second variable. This means that just over a quarter of the variation in turnout between metropolitan boroughs is left unexplained in this election. Excluding the blip in the 1987 election, the r^2 value has been increasing from the 1984 election until it flattened out in the early 1990s.

Table 5.33: Explaining the variation in turnout using the political and structural variables in the metropolitan boroughs.

	1973	1975	1978	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
NOCOUN	-.77	-.82	-.38	-.37	-.71	-.88	-.76	-.85	-.36	-.87	-1.00	-1.18	-1.13	
POPD	-.43													
TWDS	.40	.33				.52	.65	.56		.53	.52	.55	.57	
ELECT					.35									
MARG														-.70
Constant	40.4	40.3	41.5	42.5	46.0	45.0	37.8	41.0	48.4	41.2	51.5	46.5	38.5	49.4
r^2 (%)	50	45	15	14	37	49	38	44	13	51	65	74	73	49

If the political and structural variables seem to be very successful in explaining the variation in turnout in the metropolitan boroughs, how important are the socio-economic variables on their own as potential determinants of turnout? The results from the stepwise regression using the socio-economic variables in Table 5.34, show that they explain a large amount of variation in the dependent variable. For elections up to 1986, only four different variables from the 1981 census are entered into the regression equation and the greatest r^2 is relatively low at 43% in 1984. COUN81 is the most important variable as it entered into the regression equation in every year except 1978. This result tends to support the previous findings that the proportion of households in a borough which are council tenants helps to explain why the turnout may be higher in one metropolitan borough than it is in another.

What is of more interest, however, are the results when the socio-economic groups (SEG's) are added into the analysis along with the other variables from the 1991 census, because from 1986 onwards, these variables combine to produce an r^2 around 60%. The highest figure is achieved in 1992, when 63% of the variation in the dependent variable, turnout, is explained by the variables derived from the 1991 census. In this election, SELF91 entered the regression equation first and produced an r^2 of 42%. The variable WHITE91 entered next and finally, the inclusion of the SEG4 variable produced the resulting r^2 of 63%. We can generalise from the analysis of the socio-economic variables on their own over most elections to say that those boroughs that have a high proportion of their electorate belonging to the SEG2 grouping, and which have a low level of council housing are likely to have high levels of turnout.

Table 5.34: Explaining the variation in turnout using the socio-economic variables in the metropolitan boroughs.

	1978	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
UNEMP81	-.55											
COUN81		-.54	-.60	-.63	-1.87							
PENS81		.28										
OWN81					-1.42							
SEG2						.62	.93	.96	.75	.75		.69
TWOCAR91						.75		.49	.35			
COUN91						-.61						
CENT91							-.33					
NOCAR91							.35					
WHITE91								.37	.29	.34	.44	.39
SELF91											.32	
SEG4											-.47	
Constant	43.3	31.9	45.3	48.6	88.6	43.0	23.7	50.7	50.8	47.8	86.5	51.2
r^2 (%)	30	41	37	40	43	57	58	52	59	61	63	57

Finally, when all the variables were examined together using the regression procedure, Table 5.35 shows that there is a wide range in the amount of variation explained. In 1980, there was an r^2 of only 41%, while an r^2 of 86% was produced in 1991. In this election, the most important explanatory variable was NOCOUN. It entered into the regression equation

first and explained 57% of the variation in the dependent variable. The addition of four other variables into the regression brings the r^2 up to 86%. This leaves only 14% of the variation in turnout left unexplained by the independent variables in our regression. Four out of the five political and structural variables that entered the regression when these types of variable were considered on their own, also entered into the regression equation when all the variables were considered together. NOCOUN is the most successful political/structural variable as it entered the regression equation on eight occasions. The socio-economic variables such as the extent of unemployment, council housing and the proportion of people employed in the SEG2 category are the other variables which help most to explain the variation in turnout between the metropolitan boroughs.

Table 5.35: Explaining the variation in turnout using all the independent variables in the metropolitan boroughs.

	1978	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
UNEMP81	-.86											
NOCOUN	-.47		-.32	-.63		-.54		-.55		-1.04	-.75	
NOCAR81	.49											
NCWP81	.32											
COUN81		-.54	-.45	-.37	-1.87							
PENS81		.28										
TWDS				.43						.27		
POPD						.24		.30				
OWN81					-1.42							
SEG2						1.00	.93	.82	.80			
TWOCAR91						.38			.47	.39		
CENT91						-.27	-.33					
SEG5						.54		.72				
NOCAR91							.35					
WHITE91								.28			.41	
MIGRPER									.32	.16		
SEG1										.45		
SEG3M											-.31	
MARG												-.58
UNEMP91												-.36
Constant	42.4	31.9	48.6	47.4	88.6	24.0	23.7	29.0	37.1	49.7	100	53.6
r^2 (%)	56	41	44	59	43	76	58	73	75	86	83	60

5.13.1: The analysis of the residuals in the metropolitan boroughs.

The final part of the analysis of turnout in the metropolitan boroughs involved the examination of the residual boroughs. The same criteria of inclusion as a residual was used as before. Those boroughs which appear in Table 5.36 had a rate of turnout in an election more than one standard deviation above or below the level of turnout expected by the regression equation. The results in this table show that there are a number of metropolitan boroughs which appear as residuals in more than one election. Bury made the most number of appearances as a residual because of its higher than predicted levels of turnout in nine out of the twelve elections. These results lead us to ask, why the level of turnout is especially high in this borough? There is always the chance of a one-off event causing the level of turnout in a borough to rise to an unprecedented level, but there were fifteen other boroughs that appeared in the list of residuals with higher than expected levels of turnout on more than one occasion. There must, therefore, be something culturally special about these areas that result in them having a rate of turnout that is consistently unexpected.

At the other end of the spectrum, Sefton produced a much lower level of turnout than that predicted by the regression equation in nine out of the twelve elections. Table 5.36 shows that there are a total of 22 boroughs which have produced a turnout rate in an election much lower than expected by the regression model. Eleven of these boroughs have made more than one appearance in the table of outliers. The reasons behind the behaviour of boroughs that produced especially high or low levels of turnout, can only be found out by using qualitative research methods. Such methods will be carried out in Chapter 9.

We found in London, that Brent appeared in both the 'above' and 'below' lists of residual boroughs. In the metropolitan boroughs, there are thirteen boroughs that have a level of turnout in an election which is above what the regression equation predicts on one occasion, and lower than predicted in another election. Liverpool provides us with a good example of one of these boroughs. We have already discussed the high levels of turnout in Liverpool in

the early 1980s in section 2.2.3 and the reasons suggested for this situation. The especially high turnout rate in the election of 1984 makes Liverpool an 'above' residual in this year. Liverpool continued to produce higher than predicted levels of turnout in the elections of 1990 and 1991, while the borough appeared as a residual with a turnout more than one standard deviation below its predicted level in 1983.

Table 5.36: Metropolitan boroughs with 'deviant' levels of turnout in elections between 1978 and 1994 (twelve elections).

Above	Number of elections	Below	Number of elections
Bury	9	Sefton	9
Stockport	6	Sandwell	6
Trafford	5	Coventry	5
Wakefield	5	Solihull	5
Wolverhampton	5	Sunderland	5
Wirral	4	Dudley	2
Liverpool	3	Knowsley	2
Manchester	3	Oldham	2
South Tyneside	3	Sheffield	2
Walsall	3	Tameside	2
Bolton	3	Wigan	2
Coventry	2	Bolton	1
Kirklees	2	Gateshead	1
Knowsley	2	Kirklees	1
Rochdale	2	Leeds	1
Sheffield	2	Liverpool	1
Doncaster	1	Manchester	1
Gateshead	1	Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1
Leeds	1	North Tyneside	1
Salford	1	Salford	1
Solihull	1	South Tyneside	1
		Wakefield	1

5.14: Multivariate analysis of turnout in the shire districts.

We have shown so far in this chapter how the importance of the political, structural and socio-economic variables can differ between London and the metropolitan boroughs. The next step in the analysis is to investigate the determinants of turnout in the shire districts, to see how the results compare to the previous analyses.

Every election between 1973 and 1992 was analysed individually. We began by using just the political and structural variables in the regression analysis. The results in Table 5.37 show that there is quite a wide range in the value of the coefficient of determination (r^2) within the shire districts. Excluding the election in 1978 when no political or structural variables were significant enough to enter into the equation, the lowest r^2 of 8% occurred in 1982 when only one variable successfully entered into the equation. There was more success, however, in 1992 when r^2 reached 30%. In this election, NOCOUN entered the equation first and explained 27% of the variation in turnout. The addition of the COUNC variable explained another 3% of the variation in turnout. An r^2 of 30% is a respectable figure but it does not compare with the best results produced for other types of local authorities. In London, nearly half of the variation in the dependent variable was explained by the political and structural variables, while in the metropolitan boroughs in 1992, an r^2 of 77% was achieved using the same set of variables. As there are many more cases in the districts, this means that there is likely to be more variation in turnout that needs explaining. This may help to justify the low r^2 figures in the districts compared to the results found in London and the metropolitan boroughs.

The political and structural variables that entered into the regression equation in the shire districts are quite different from the ones which entered into the regressions in sections 5.12 and 5.13. In London, NOCOUN entered into the equation in nearly every election and MARG entered into two regression equations. In the metropolitan boroughs, NOCOUN continued to be important, while MARG entered into only one equation. In the shire districts, MARG entered the regression equation eight times out of twelve elections, while NOCOUN made four appearances. The frequent occurrences of these variables would seem to suggest that they may be influential enough to enter the regression equations when all the variables are considered together. Finally, the variables measuring the size of the shire districts: the electorate variable (ELECT), the elector:ward (WRATIO) and the elector:councillor (CRATIO) ratios, were all quite important in the analysis as they entered

into the equation on a number of occasions. The importance of these variables was not matched in London and the metropolitan boroughs.

Table 5.37: Explaining the variation in turnout using the political and structural variables in the shire districts.

	1973	1976	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992
WRATIO	-.56	-.64				-.24		.49				
MARG	-.26		-.25		-.19	-.33	-.26	-.65	-.40	-.31		
POPD	.27	.41										
NOCOUN		-.31						.63			-.44	-.64
COUNC		.19			.24						.91	.23
CRATIO		.22		-.28			-.27				.46	
ELECT			-.19					-.62	-.19	-.21	-.70	
TWDS					-.42						-.26	
Constant	43.5	39.3	46.7	45.0	45.8	50.3	51.0	50.1	52.3	56.4	33.7	43.0
r^2 (%)	22	18	10	8	17	18	15	17	22	17	23	30

The next step was to examine the effect of the socio-economic variables in explaining the variation in local election turnout. The same set of variables from the 1981 and 1991 censuses were used in this analysis as were used in London and the metropolitan boroughs. Table 5.38 shows that once again there is quite a wide distribution of r^2 figures across the elections. In 1980 and 1983, the lowest r^2 of 8% was produced. The highest amount of the variation in turnout was explained in 1992 when a figure of 33% was found. This figure was reached when SEG2 was the first variable to enter into the equation. It explained 24% of the variation in turnout on its own. Before the statistical limits were reached, PENS91 explained an additional 9% of the variation in turnout. The r^2 of 33% is 30 percentage points less than the level of turnout variation explained by the census variables in the metropolitan boroughs in the same election.

Table 5.38: Explaining the variation in turnout using the socio-economic variables in the shire districts.

	1978	1980	1982	1983	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992
UNEMP81			-.37	-.28						
NOCAR81				.22						
NCWP81	.38	.20		.12						
PENS81		.22		-.18						
SEG3M					-.31		-.26			
SELF91					.28					
WHITE91					-.17					
SEG1						.36			.33	
SEG3N						.20			.17	
NOCAR91						.46				
UNEMP91						-.38				
PENS91							.20	.32		.30
SEG2								.28		.47
CENT91									-.14	
Constant	37.3	33.5	45.7	44.1	63.4	32.3	41.8	36.3	41.8	18.6
r^2 (%)	14	8	14	8	24	23	12	20	14	33

The final stage of the statistical analysis is when all the variables are added together into the stepwise regression. It is thought that a combination of the three different types of variables will be able to improve the r^2 figure. Turnout in local elections has a great number of determinants, but the results of the regression output in Table 5.39 shows that we can formulate a regression equation that at best explains over a third of the variation in turnout. The r^2 figures vary between 18% in 1984 to 44% in 1992. The political variable, NOCOUN, was the most important explanatory variable in the election of 1992 as it entered the regression equation first and produced an r^2 of 27%. When the variables, TWOCAR91 and SEG2 proceeded to enter the equation, the r^2 reached 44%. Although the r^2 figures are not as high in the districts as in London and the metropolitan boroughs, the results are still reasonable considering the number of districts in the analysis. It seems that the comparatively lower r^2 results in the districts may also be because there are a lower number of very safe councils in the districts than there are in London and the metropolitan boroughs. In the metropolitan boroughs for example, Labour are dominant in the majority of local authorities. The electorate may feel that the political contests are decided before any voting

takes place. Finally, the more homogeneous social make-up of the London and metropolitan boroughs, means that the socio-economic factors can not account for the same amount of variation in the socially disparate districts.

Table 5.39: Explaining the variation in turnout using all the independent variables in the shire districts.

	1978	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992
NCWP81	.42	.26	.26								
ELECT	-.41	-.27					-.30	-.21			
PENS81	.35	.21									
MARG		-.23		-.20	-.33	-.21	-.53	-.33	-.23		
UNEMP81			-.31	-.20							
WRATIO			-.29		-.24				-.20	-.25	
TWDS				-.45			-.15			.45	
COUNC				.26							
SEG3M						-.34					
CRATIO						-.30					
PENS91						.24			.33	.12	
WHITE91						-.22					
SEG1							.31	.29	.18	.28	
SEG3N							.12				
NOCOUN							.46			-.43	-.41
POPD							.18				
TWOCAR91								.63			.35
UNEMP91								-.43			
SEG2											.64
Constant	36.9	41.0	46.8	48.5	50.3	76.6	45.5	62.7	45.9	35.5	35.1
r^2 (%)	**35**	**20**	**24**	**21**	**18**	**36**	**29**	**38**	**29**	**28**	**44**

5.14.1: The analysis of the residuals in the shire districts.

The next step after the regression analysis is to discover which districts produced turnout rates that were not predicted by the regressions. The criteria for inclusion as a residual is more stringent than it was for London and the metropolitan boroughs. The residual districts are defined as those with a level of turnout more than two standard deviations above or below the predicted level. This change was enacted because there are many more cases in the districts, hence, there will also be more instances of local government areas having a

'deviant' rate of turnout and the regression equation being less successful in its explanation. Although the rules of analysis are slightly different, we will continue to discover if there are similar patterns of results.

The districts were divided into two groupings, those which have all-out elections and those that elect by thirds. This was done to see if there was a pattern of districts that appeared as a residual on more than one occasion. Table 5.40 shows that there were seven districts that produced a turnout in an election more than two standard deviations above the mean. Derbyshire Dales (Derbyshire) and Gedling (Nottinghamshire) appeared as residuals in two out of the three elections. Four districts which hold all-out elections appeared as residuals because of their lower than predicted level of turnout. Holderness (Humberside) is the only district that appears as a residual in more than one election.

Table 5.40: Shire districts with 'deviant' levels of turnout in elections between 1983 and 1991 (three all-out elections).

Above	Number of elections	Below	Number of elections
Derbyshire Dales	2	Holderness	2
Gedling	2	Blyth Valley	1
High Peak	1	Epsom and Ewell	1
Lewes	1	Kingston-upon-Hull	1
North Dorset	1		
Plymouth	1		
Warwick	1		

The results in Table 5.41 for the districts that hold elections by thirds show quite clearly that the regression equations can not explain why the level of turnout is unusually high in Rossendale, Welwyn Hatfield and North Hertfordshire. Similarly, we can not understand why the turnout in Hartlepool, Penwith and West Lindsey is lower than expected in a number of elections. These are the districts that appeared as residuals in more than one election. Further investigation of some of these districts will be carried in a later chapter using qualitative research methods.

For now, it is interesting to refer back to the average turnouts of all the districts which was carried out in Chapter 4. Of the ten districts with the highest average turnout rates that appeared in Table 4.11, seven of them (Rossendale, Exeter, Welwyn Hatfield, Pendle, North Hertfordshire, St. Albans and Derbyshire Dales) appeared as residuals either in Tables 5.40 or 5.41 with a turnout more than two standard deviations above the predicted level. Also, three out of the bottom ten turnout districts in Table 4.11 appeared as residuals (Kingston-upon-Hull, Holderness and Hartlepool). This shows that the independent variables in our regression equations fail to explain the behaviour of most of the high turnout districts. As a result, there must be something different about these areas which produced special rates of turnout.

Finally, both Table 5.40 and Table 5.41 show that there are a number of districts that appeared as 'one-off' high turnout residuals. These fourteen districts emphasise the fact that there are more cases of districts that produced a one-off 'deviant' level of turnout, perhaps as a result of a special local event or issue, than there are districts that appeared as high turnout residuals in more than one election (only five cases). Throughout this thesis, we shall attempt to offer explanations for the behaviour of one-off and persistent residuals.

Table 5.41: Shire districts with 'deviant' levels of turnout in elections between 1983 and 1991 (eight third elections).

Above	Number of elections	Below	Number of elections
Rossendale	7		3
Welwyn Hatfield	4	Penwith	2
North Hertfordshire	2	West Lindsey	2
Basildon	1	Havant	1
Brentwood	1	Hereford	1
Bristol	1	Kingston-upon-Hull	1
Chorley	1	Purbeck	1
Exeter	1	South Cambridgeshire	1
Harlow	1	Tunbridge	1
Pendle	1	Worthing	1
St. Albans	1		
Tandridge	1		

5.15: Conclusions.

We have analysed a number of potential determinants of turnout at the local authority level and have seen how some variables are more important than others according to the type of local authority. Table 5.42 summarises the results of all the analyses. As we can see, there is some consistency to the findings. For example, the variable, NOCOUN ('Largest group of councillors') is important in the correlations and multivariate analysis in London, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts. It appears that the more dominant a single party at the previous election, the lower the level of turnout in the following election. The variable measuring the level of unemployment also produced significant correlations across local government. The higher the percentage of unemployment in a local authority, the lower the level of turnout.

Table 5.42: Comparison of the determinants of turnout at the local authority level.

	London boroughs	Metropolitan boroughs	Shire districts
Correlations	Largest group of councillors (-ve) Marginality (-ve) Council housing (-ve) No access to a car (-ve) Owner occupiers (+ve) Unemployment (-ve)	Largest group of councillors (-ve) Council housing (-ve) Owner occupiers (+ve) Socio Economic Groupings Unemployment (-ve)	Largest group of councillors (-ve) Marginality (-ve) Size of electorate (-ve) Elector:Councillor ratio (-ve) Elector:Ward ratio (-ve) Socio Economic Groupings Unemployment (-ve)
Multivariate	Largest group of councillors (-ve) Council housing (-ve) Unemployment (-ve)	Largest group of councillors (-ve) Council housing (-ve) Socio Economic Grouping 2 (+ve) Having access to two cars (+ve)	Largest group of councillors (-ve) Marginality (-ve) Size of electorate (-ve) Elector:Councillor ratio (-ve) Elector:Ward ratio (-ve) Socio Economic Groupings Unemployment (-ve)

There is, however, some evidence of variation in the influence of some variables in our analyses. For example, the variables that measure the size of the electorate in a council (ELECT), the elector:ward ratio (WRATIO) and the elector:councillor ratio (CRATIO), appeared only to be important in the shire districts. Negative relationships were found at the

early stage of testing hypotheses by simple bivariate analysis, significant negative correlation coefficients were then produced and finally, all three variables were successfully entered into a number of regression equations. Another example of the influence of a variable not being consistent across the three types of local authorities are the variables measuring housing composition. The percentage of households living in council housing produced negative relationships with turnout at each stage of analysis in London and the metropolitan boroughs, but a similar result was not found in the districts. Also, in London and the metropolitan boroughs, where the Conservatives were the largest party in the council, the turnout was always higher in the next election, rather than when Labour had the most number of councillors. Again, this relationship was not found in the districts. The variables measuring the socio-economic groups are important determinants of turnout. Those local authorities that have low proportions of their electorate belonging to SEG3M, along with a high percentage of the electorate in the SEG2 and SEG3N categories, are more likely to produce high levels of turnout than other local authorities with a different socio-economic make-up.

To conclude, while this chapter has shown some interesting relationships between a number of variables and turnout and has identified a number of key residuals worthy of further investigation, it is now time to move down to the ward level to examine whether these relationships continue.

Chapter 6: Explaining turnout variation in London wards.

6.1: Previous analysis of local election turnout at the ward level.

There has been little research into voter participation at the ward level in local elections, due in part to the unavailability of data. What has been written mostly stems from accounting for turnout variation in wards within a particular city. The wards in Birmingham for example, were studied by two sets of academics. Firstly, Davies and Newton used aggregate data to conclude that, 'the figures have shown that turnout consistently varies with the class, housing, and age structure of electorates and, to a lesser degree but still significant extent with their percentage of coloured immigrants' (1974:228). Secondly, Gibson and Stewart looked into the hypothesised relationship between electoral accountability and the poll tax, based on 1990 ward election results. They found that within the average turnout figure given for a city, there are quite large differences between wards in the level of turnout and that, 'there is a tendency ...for turnout to be lowest in the wards with the highest potential losses' (due to the increase in the tax bill in this area) (1991:65).

An article that broke new ground in the study of turnout in local elections was carried out by Rallings and Thrasher (1990). They used aggregate data to explain deviations in rates of voter participation with the use of political, structural and socio-economic variables. A model of voter turnout was built and then a number of wards were examined whose level of turnout were considerably above or below that predicted. Reasons were then put forward to explain this 'deviant' behaviour.

Research into electoral behaviour at the ward level in local elections has been mostly overlooked compared to the attention given to general elections and elections at the local authority level. There are examples of research conducted into voting behaviour at the ward level but there has been no particular focus on turnout. For example, Curtice *et al.* (1983) made a decision not to collect data on the size of the electorate in each ward, which meant

that they were unable to carry out any analysis of turnout. Clearly, there is a need for research into turnout at the ward level to redress this imbalance because we may be able to identify important patterns of behaviour at the ward level. Curtice and Payne agree with this point by writing that, 'ward level analysis is important because it can enable us to identify significant variation that is not detectable at other levels of analysis' (1991:7). The analysis in this chapter is the first piece of research that has used aggregate data analysis to examine the variation in turnout in London wards. The following two chapters will follow a similar course, concentrating on metropolitan and district wards respectively.

6.2: Introduction.

The aim of this chapter is to explain the variation in the level of turnout that may occur between wards in London over time. There are 32 boroughs in London and data have been collected from the 1964 election onwards. Re-organisation has meant that ward boundaries have not remained the same over time. Our data-set only includes those wards that are identical over the time period, resulting in a total of 722 wards that can be analysed in every election between 1978 and 1994. Five elections have been held in this time period, so there are 3,610 cases in the data-set. These wards are not homogeneous electoral units, but vary widely according to their political history and socio-economic composition. The wards also vary structurally from each other, for example, the size of the electorate has a wide range. Nightingale in Greenwich (one councillor) had the smallest ward electorate with only 1,187 registered people in the 1978 election, while Hadley in Barnet (three councillors) had the most number of eligible voters in a ward with an electorate of 13,596 for the election of 1994.

The main advantage of the analysis at the ward level is that it becomes more sophisticated as we move down the aggregation scale. At the borough level, we can only suggest variables that may be important. At the ward level, the analysis will be able to confirm or disprove

these relationships. The analysis of residuals at the ward level will enable us to identify why the turnout in a particular ward is 'deviant'.

6.3: Historical background to turnout rates in London wards.

Table 6.1 shows that the average turnout in London wards has remained at a steady level over time, with a range of just over five percentage points between the highest average turnout of 48.3% in 1990 and the lowest of 43.1% at the 1978 election. The overall average turnout figure for the London wards in the data-set is 45.4%. The two extreme figures for turnout rates in every election (Min) and (Max), also indicate that the turnout is relatively consistent. The range of the lowest turnout figures is six percentage points (18-24%), while the highest levels of voter participation deviate just four percentage points (65-69%) over the time period.

While there is some consistency with the average rates of turnout and also the minimum and maximum figures over the five elections, there is a large variance between the lowest and the highest turnout rates. Table 6.1 shows that there was a turnout of 18% in a ward in 1990, while in 1978 and in 1990, there were instances of 69% of the electorate in a ward turning out to vote. Such a great range of turnout (51 percentage points) in the same type of elections in a single city demands some explanation.

Table 6.1: The averages and range in the level of turnout in London wards by year of election (1978-1994).

Year	Mean	Min	Ward	Borough	Max	Ward	Borough
1978	43.1	21	Blackwall	Tower Hamlets	69	Ickenham	Hillingdon
1982	43.9	20	Liddle	Southwark	66	Richmond Town	Richmond-upon-Thames
1986	45.5	24	Beckton	Newham	65	Palewell	Richmond-upon-Thames
1990	48.3	18	Liddle	Southwark	69	Churchill	Westminster
1994	46.1	20	Liddle	Southwark	67	Millwall	Tower Hamlets

We have shown in Chapter 5 that the same local authorities can produce rates of turnout that place them in the top or bottom ten turnout rates in a number of elections. Table 6.1 supports this finding with results from the ward level, because Richmond-upon-Thames produced two different wards, Richmond Town in 1982 and Palewell in 1986, that have the highest rates of turnout in an election. Also, the same ward, Liddle from Southwark, produced the lowest level of voter participation in three out of the five elections (1982, 1990 and 1994). What is surprising, is to find a borough (Tower Hamlets) that produced one ward with the lowest rate of turnout in one election, Blackwall in 1978, and another ward, Millwall, that had the highest turnout in another election (1994).

The next two sections will examine those wards that appear at the extreme ends of the turnout scale, to see, for example, how many wards appear more than once in the list of wards with high/low rates of turnout. We can investigate which boroughs the wards belong to and then attempt to ascertain the reasons for the behaviour of a ward. This analysis is merely of an exploratory nature because these wards are not statistical outliers. By studying the structure, the political background and the socio-economic composition of these high/low turnout wards, the especially high/low rates of turnout may have been expected.

6.4: High turnout wards in the London boroughs.

We decided to examine the ten wards with the highest rates of turnout in each of five elections. We also included in the analysis the ward(s) that were equal tenth highest in an election. Table 6.2 includes 58 wards and shows that the wards came from a small selection of boroughs. For example, Richmond-upon-Thames provides 26 wards (45% of the total), Hillingdon has ten (17%) occurrences in the table and Greenwich has eight wards (14%) out of the total. There are also a number of wards that appear more than once in Table 6.2. Palewell from Richmond-upon-Thames, appears in the top ten ward turnouts in every election, while the Barnes and East Sheen wards, also from the borough of Richmond-upon-Thames, both appear four times out of five opportunities. There are another five wards,

Ham and Petersham, Kew and Richmond Town from Richmond-upon-Thames, Hillingdon North from Hillingdon and Eltham Park from Greenwich, that appear in Table 6.2 on three occasions each.

There are also wards that appear only once in the league of high turnout rates. The Ickenham ward from Hillingdon for example, sits at the top of the table as it achieved a turnout of 69% in 1978. The average turnout in this ward excluding the 1978 election is 56%. This would seem to indicate that a local event or issue may have helped to raise the level of turnout in this election. Another ward that appears only once in Table 6.2 is Millwall from the borough of Tower Hamlets. Excluding the election in 1994, when the ward produced a turnout of 67%, the average turnout in Millwall is around the 30% mark. The reason for this extraordinary result in 1994 is believed to be due to the contestation of the BNP and the resulting media attention. We would hypothesise at this stage of analysis that this ward is likely to be a statistical outlier, because our calculations can not take account of the unusual political circumstances surrounding this election.

Another ward that appears on only one occasion in Table 6.2 is the Fairfield ward from the borough of Wandsworth. In 1990, the ward produced a turnout rate of 65%. Wandsworth set a poll tax rate of only £148 in 1990 compared to the national average of £275. This low tax bill may have prompted some voters to support the local council by turning out to vote. Not only was the level of turnout over 50% in the borough of Wandsworth in 1990, but the Conservative share of the vote in the borough was also over 50% for the first time since 1968.

The winner column in Table 6.2 shows that the Liberal Democrats came first in 26 of the 58 high turnout wards and the Conservatives came first in 25 of the wards. The remaining seven wards had the Labour party in first position. This would seem to suggest that turnout may be dependent upon the state of party competition in a ward. For example, wards where the Liberal Democrats have concentrated campaign resources can witness high rates of

turnout. On the other hand, it appears that high levels of turnout are unlikely to occur in wards where Labour are strong. Finally, Table 6.2 provides us the figure measuring the closeness of the previous ward contest (Margin). 24 wards had a margin of less than 10% at the last election, while overall, the average margin figure for the 58 wards is 15.5%. These results indicate that a close previous election in a ward may lead to a high turnout at the following election.

Table 6.2: List of London wards that appeared in the top ten ward turnout rates in each election between 1978 and 1994.

Ward (Borough)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Ickenham (Hillingdon)	1978	69	Conservative	20.54
Churchill (Westminster)	1990	69	Conservative	6.54
Barnes (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1990	68	Lib Dems	1.64
Millwall (Tower Hamlets)	1994	67	Labour	6.47
Ruislip (Hillingdon)	1978	66	Conservative	21.05
Richmond Town (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1982	66	Lib Dems	14.69
Uxbridge North (Hillingdon)	1978	65	Conservative	36.47
Richmond Town (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1978	65	Lib Dems	4.07
Palewell (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1982	65	Lib Dems	1.40
Palewell (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1986	65	Lib Dems	1.93
Barnehurst North (Bexley)	1990	65	Conservative	13.31
East Sheen (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1990	65	Conservative	1.05
Ham and Petersham (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1990	65	Lib Dems	38.82
Clockhouse (Sutton)	1990	65	Conservative	2.94
Fairfield (Wandsworth)	1990	65	Conservative	5.82
Barnes (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1978	64	Lib Dems	7.07
Kew (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1978	64	Conservative	32.89
Palewell (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1978	64	Lib Dems	10.73
Avery Hill (Greenwich)	1990	64	Lib Dems	33.67
Shrewsbury (Greenwich)	1990	64	Conservative	2.48
Cavendish (Hillingdon)	1990	64	Conservative	7.15
Cambridge (Kingston-upon-Thames)	1990	64	Lib Dems	12.30
Palewell (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1990	64	Lib Dems	17.13
Eltham Park (Greenwich)	1982	63	Conservative	28.07
Sulivan (Hammersmith and Fulham)	1982	63	Conservative	12.60
East Sheen (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1982	63	Conservative	25.20
Kew (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1982	63	Lib Dems	4.06
Worcester Park South (Sutton)	1982	63	Conservative	55.09
Avery Hill (Greenwich)	1986	63	Lib Dems	13.78
Barnes (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1986	63	Lib Dems	10.48
Worcester Park South (Sutton)	1986	63	Lib Dems	9.02
Barnehurst North (Bexley)	1994	63	Labour	7.37
Hillingdon North (Hillingdon)	1978	62	Labour	19.72
Ham and Petersham (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1978	62	Lib Dems	8.86
Barnes (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1982	62	Conservative	16.61

Table 6.2: cont:

Ward (Borough)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Hampton Nursery (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1982	62	Conservative	17.53
Teddington (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1982	62	Lib Dems	28.37
Cavendish (Hillingdon)	1986	62	Lib Dems	21.04
Ham and Petersham (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1986	62	Lib Dems	33.30
Richmond Town (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1986	62	Lib Dems	18.38
Falconwood (Bexley)	1994	62	Conservative	1.14
Hillingdon North (Hillingdon)	1994	62	Labour	3.81
Deansfield (Greenwich)	1978	61	Labour	25.79
Deansfield (Hillingdon)	1978	61	Conservative	43.10
Northwood (Hillingdon)	1978	61	Conservative	16.43
West Twickenham (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1978	61	Lib Dems	24.81
Eltham Park (Greenwich)	1986	61	Conservative	28.93
Hillingdon North (Hillingdon)	1986	61	Lib Dems	4.18
East Sheen (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1986	61	Conservative	15.68
Kew (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1986	61	Lib Dems	12.64
Teddington (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1986	61	Lib Dems	2.56
Eltham Park (Greenwich)	1994	61	Conservative	9.81
Shrewsbury (Greenwich)	1994	61	Labour	2.10
East Sheen (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1994	61	Conservative	10.68
Palewell (Richmond-upon-Thames)	1994	61	Lib Dems	8.93
Clockhouse (Sutton)	1994	61	Lib Dems	32.11
St. James' (Tower Hamlets)	1994	60	Labour	17.54
Churchill (Westminster)	1994	60	Conservative	9.41

The next step in the preliminary analysis of the highest turnout wards is to examine the political competition and socio-economic composition of two wards that appeared a number of times in Table 6.2. The wards chosen were Richmond Town (Richmond-upon-Thames) in 1986 and Hillingdon North (Hillingdon) in 1994. Both of these wards made three appearances in Table 6.2. The contest in Richmond Town in 1986 had the Liberal Democrats in first position. At the previous ward election a margin of 18.38% existed between the leading two parties. The Liberal Democrats managed to extend their lead over the second placed party in the 1986 election. It seems, therefore, that close political competition in the ward is not a factor behind the high turnout of 62%. In Hillingdon North, the figure for previous marginality was less than four percentage points and all three parties were fighting in the ward election. Hence, in this case the political competition in the ward may partly explain a high turnout. Finally, the size of the electorate in both wards was

smaller (4,609 in Richmond Town and 5,075 in Hillingdon North) than the average ward electorate figure for London (6,689), so this may be another determinant of the high turnout.

Table 6.3 shows the socio-economic composition of the two wards. The first point of comparison between the wards are the two variables measuring the type of housing. Both Richmond Town and Hillingdon North have a higher proportion of home owners (OWNOCC) and a lower percentage of council tenants (COUNCIL) than the average census figures for all London wards in the data-set. The occupational structure of the electorate in these two wards shows some divergence. While the majority of workers in Richmond Town are located in the professional/managerial group (PROFMAN), the highest proportion of workers in Hillingdon North are in manual (MANUAL) jobs. Finally, the unemployment (UNEMP) levels in Richmond Town and Hillingdon North are both less than the 1991 census figure. Hence, the socio-economic make-up of the two wards suggests that they are relatively prosperous electoral units.

Table 6.3: The socio-economic make-up of two high turnout wards in London compared to the average census figures for the data-set and the average census figures for the high turnout wards*.

Variable	Census 1991	Mean census figures for the high turnout wards	Richmond Town 1986	Hillingdon North 1994
COUNCIL	27.1	17.7	7.9	11.9
MANUAL	33.3	23.5	11.4	35.6
MANUF	17.0	9.4	7.0	12.2
NCWP	19.1	9.1	5.1	7.0
NOCAR	42.8	31.7	41.3	21.7
OWNOCC	52.6	67.2	57.2	82.3
PROFMAN	19.6	27.2	39.5	22.4
SELFEMP	11.3	14.2	16.1	8.9
SKILLED	17.8	15.4	6.0	26.2
UNEMP	8.1	5.1	4.8	4.1

*(Only 35 out of the 58 high turnout wards are included in the mean census figures for the high turnout wards, as these are the wards that had their high rates of turnout in elections after 1985. Hence, we are comparing the values for the socio-economic variables from the 1991 census only). (Figures in the table are all percentages).

6.5: Low turnout wards in the London boroughs.

Next, we analysed the ten wards with the lowest rates of turnout in each election over the sixteen year period. Similar results to those reported in section 6.4 were found. A majority of the 58 wards in Table 6.4 could be found in just three boroughs. Newham had 21 wards (36% of the total) in the table, Southwark made twelve appearances (21%) and Tower Hamlets had seven wards (12%) out of the total. As was the case with the high turnout wards, a number appeared more than once in the list of low turnout wards. Liddle (Southwark) was placed in the bottom ten in every election (five appearances), while Ordnance (Newham) appeared on four occasions. There were three wards, Beckton, Custom House and Silvertown and Stratford, all from the borough of Newham that each appeared on three occasions.

Table 6.4 illustrates that out of the 58 low turnout wards, the Labour party came first in 52 of them. The other six wards had the Conservatives receiving the highest share of the vote. This contrasts with the wards with the highest rates of turnout in section 6.4 because only seven of these wards had Labour in first position. This would seem to suggest that there may be a negative relationship between turnout and wards where the Labour party are strong. The figures for previous marginality show that four wards in Table 6.4 had a margin of less than 10% between the top two parties at the last election. This compares to 24 of the high turnout wards which had a similarly low previous marginality figure. The average margin figure in Table 6.4 was 43.8%, which is more than 28 percentage points higher than the result found for the high turnout wards. At this early stage of analysis, it seems that at the extreme ends of the turnout scale, previous marginality does have a negative effect upon the level of turnout.

Table 6.4: List of London wards that appeared in the bottom ten ward turnout rates in each election between 1978 and 1994.

Ward (Borough)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Liddle (Southwark)	1990	18	Labour	71.35
Liddle (Southwark)	1982	20	Labour	55.94
Liddle (Southwark)	1994	20	Labour	75.00
Blackwall (Tower Hamlets)	1978	21	Labour	25.09
Ordnance (Newham)	1982	21	Labour	69.54
Faraday (Southwark)	1982	22	Labour	39.74
Limehouse (Tower Hamlets)	1982	22	Labour	50.78
Millwall (Tower Hamlets)	1982	22	Labour	49.67
Custom House and Silvertown (Newham)	1978	23	Labour	6.52
Ordnance (Newham)	1978	23	Labour	46.61
Faraday (Southwark)	1978	23	Labour	42.43
Beckton (Newham)	1982	23	Labour	74.44
Limehouse (Tower Hamlets)	1978	24	Labour	7.99
Millwall (Tower Hamlets)	1978	24	Labour	38.73
Custom House and Silvertown (Newham)	1982	24	Labour	65.96
Stratford (Newham)	1982	24	Labour	51.36
Lansbury (Tower Hamlets)	1982	24	Labour	51.35
Beckton (Newham)	1986	24	Labour	46.32
Courtfield (Kensington and Chelsea)	1978	25	Conservative	40.30
Angell (Lambeth)	1978	25	Labour	10.48
Park (Newham)	1978	25	Labour	18.41
Stratford (Newham)	1978	25	Labour	2.86
West Ham (Newham)	1978	25	Labour	54.06
Liddle (Southwark)	1978	25	Labour	12.63
Rotherhithe (Southwark)	1978	25	Labour	16.24
St. Peters (Tower Hamlets)	1978	25	Labour	16.59
Marlowe (Lewisham)	1982	25	Labour	47.99
Liddle (Southwark)	1986	25	Labour	46.54
Ordnance (Newham)	1986	26	Labour	43.53
Baker Street (Westminster)	1986	26	Conservative	46.76
Canning Town and Grange (Newham)	1986	27	Labour	35.01
Custom House and Silvertown (Newham)	1986	27	Labour	23.61
Stratford (Newham)	1986	27	Labour	32.79
Beckton (Newham)	1990	27	Labour	54.31
Fanshawe (Barking and Dagenham)	1986	29	Labour	81.58
Westdown (Hackney)	1986	29	Labour	62.30
Hudsons (Newham)	1986	29	Labour	22.95
Plaistow (Newham)	1986	29	Labour	56.40
Heathfield (Croydon)	1990	29	Conservative	39.98
Ordnance (Newham)	1990	29	Labour	57.49
West Ham (Newham)	1994	29	Labour	34.06
St. Giles (Southwark)	1994	29	Labour	42.27
Stonebridge (Brent)	1990	30	Labour	54.96
Eastdown (Hackney)	1990	30	Labour	60.47
Westdown (Hackney)	1990	30	Labour	59.02
Brompton (Kensington and Chelsea)	1994	30	Conservative	57.95
Evelyn (Lewisham)	1994	30	Labour	57.32
Knightsbridge (Westminster)	1994	30	Conservative	30.86
St. Raphael's (Brent)	1990	31	Labour	57.62

Table 6.4: cont:

Ward (Borough)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Kings Park (Hackney)	1990	31	Labour	54.39
Custom House and Silvertown (Newham)	1990	31	Labour	45.92
Grinling Gibbons (Lewisham)	1994	31	Labour	48.26
Eastdown (Hackney)	1994	32	Labour	60.55
Royal Hospital (Kensington and Chelsea)	1994	32	Conservative	65.75
New Town (Newham)	1994	32	Labour	6.04
Alleyn (Southwark)	1994	32	Labour	18.51
Bruntswick (Southwark)	1994	32	Labour	47.10
Consort (Southwark)	1994	32	Labour	49.02

The final area for enquiry in this section was to examine the political and social composition of two wards that appear a number of times in the bottom ten turnout wards. Liddle was chosen as one of the wards as it appeared five times in Table 6.4 and its average turnout over the period was a lowly 21.6%. The second ward chosen was Ordnance (Newham) which appeared four times in Table 6.4.

The political situation in the two wards was examined first, using the election of 1982 as our example. The figures for previous marginality in the two wards indicate that Labour had a lead of more than 50 percentage points over the second placed party in both wards. The election of 1982 produced similar results which suggests that these are very safe wards for Labour. The size of the electorate in Liddle was large at 8,321, as the average size of the ward electorate in London is 6,689. Following my earlier hypothesis of the larger the size of a local government area, the lower the level of turnout, this may also help to explain the low turnout in the ward.

The next area to investigate was to examine the socio-economic make-up of Liddle and Ordnance. Table 6.5 shows that 97.7% of households in Liddle are council tenants. This is the highest proportion of council tenants in the whole of London. Less than 1% of households in the ward are owner-occupiers. The situation in Ordnance is similar to that of Liddle with council tenants comprising 90.4% of households with only 2.4% owner

occupiers. We also found that the proportion of manual, manufacturing and skilled workers in these wards were higher than the average 1981 census figures. On the other hand, the wards were composed of fewer workers in the professional/managerial class and showed higher than average levels of unemployment. According to the 1981 census, the unemployment rate in Liddle was 18.3%, which is double the average, while an even higher 22.1% of economically active males in Ordnance were unemployed. Certainly, the relative deprivation of these wards can help to explain the low levels of turnout.

Table 6.5: The socio-economic make-up of two low turnout wards in London compared to the average census figures for the data-set and the average census figures for the low turnout wards*.

Variable	Census 1981	Mean census figures for the low turnout wards	Liddle 1982	Ordnance 1982
COUNCIL	31.7	77.7	97.7	90.4
MANUAL	41.7	59.3	66.1	67.3
MANUF	26.9	32.8	32.7	41.6
NCWP	18.0	20.7	35.8	14.2
NOCAR	45.4	63.8	69.4	67.3
OWNOCC	47.1	9.3	0.6	2.4
PROFMAN	17.7	7.5	4.0	4.5
SELFEMP	9.6	6.1	5.3	5.5
SKILLED	19.6	23.9	28.5	23.8
UNEMP	8.9	16.1	18.3	22.1

*(Only 24 out of the 58 low turnout wards are included in the mean census figures for the low turnout wards, as these are the wards that had their low rates of turnout in elections before 1985. Hence, we are comparing the values for the socio-economic variables from the 1981 census only).

6.6: The 'highs and lows' of ward turnout within the London boroughs.

The previous two sections have shown that there are many instances of wards having very high or low levels of turnout. Indeed, there is a range of 51 percentage points between the lowest turnout at the ward level of 18% in Liddle (Southwark) in 1990 and the highest ward turnout of 69% in Ickenham (Hillingdon) in 1978 and the same figure in Churchill (Westminster) in 1990. This section concentrates on examining whether turnout rates in

wards are consistent within a London borough. Our hypothesis is that the low turnout wards will be in boroughs with other instances of wards with low turnouts and the same relationship will exist for high turnout rates. Turnout is, therefore, expected to be relatively consistent within a borough in a single election and also over time.

By comparing the high and low turnout wards in Tables 6.2 and 6.4, we find that there are two boroughs that produce wards which appear in both tables. The London borough of Westminster provided one such example. It had one ward that appeared twice in the top ten turnout rates in an election (Churchill in 1990 and 1994), and two wards that appeared in the bottom ten turnout rates in an election (Baker Street in 1986 and Knightsbridge in 1994). These figures reveal that in the 1994 elections to Westminster, the borough had one ward in the top ten and another ward in the bottom ten turnout rates. This finding is contrary to our hypothesis of turnout being consistent within a borough. The other borough which had wards that appeared in both Table 6.2 and Table 6.4 is Tower Hamlets. This borough had seven cases of wards appearing in the list of bottom turnout wards (Limehouse in 1978 and 1982, Millwall in 1978 and 1982, Blackwall and St. Peters in 1978 and Lansbury in 1982) and two wards in the top ten (Millwall and St. James' in 1994). The Millwall ward appeared in both the tables of high and low turnout wards. This is yet another illustration of the wide level of turnout variation in local elections. Not only does turnout vary between elections, local authorities and wards, but it can also vary significantly within a ward over time.

The lowest and highest ward turnout figures and the average rates of turnout in the London boroughs are illustrated in Table 6.6. The figures can be examined in two respects. Firstly, we can see how the average rate of turnout varies within a borough over the five elections. Secondly, we can contrast the minimum and maximum turnout figures within a borough. Richmond-upon-Thames has a high average turnout that is consistent over time. There is less than five percentage points difference between their lowest average turnout in an election, 54.9% in 1994 and the highest figure of 59.8% in 1990. Richmond-upon-Thames would seem to confirm our hypothesis as turnout is high in each election and this high

average turnout in the borough is reflected across all the wards. The ward in Richmond-upon-Thames with the lowest rate of turnout still has a figure (46%) that is above the average ward turnout for London in the data-set. The borough that has the most constant average turnout rate over time is Ealing. Over the sixteen year period, their average turnout varies by only two and a half percentage points between 46.9% in 1978 and 49.4% in 1982.

Table 6.6: Deviation of turnout at the ward level within the London boroughs (about here).

If we examine the minimum and maximum turnout rates within the borough of Ealing, we can see that the average borough turnout rate disguises a wide range in turnout that can exist between the wards. In the 1978 election, for example, one ward in Ealing produced a turnout rate of 38%, while another ward had a turnout of 56%. This provides a range in turnout of eighteen percentage points between the two wards in the borough. There are a number of London boroughs which have wards that produce high and low turnouts in the same election and repeat this process in other elections. In the borough of Southwark, for example, there is a wide range between the level of turnout amongst their wards. We know from our analysis in section 6.5 that Liddle produces a consistently low level of turnout but within the same borough there are instances of turnout in a ward reaching 58% (1990). Table 6.7 shows the top ten cases of the highest range between a borough's minimum and maximum turnout figures in an election.

Table 6.6: Deviation of turnout at the ward level within the London boroughs.

	1978			1982			1986			1990			1994		
	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max
Barking and Dagenham	28	34.0	45	24	34.6	44	29	35.7	52	33	39.1	52	34	39.2	56
Barnet	38	43.6	49	37	43.3	49	33	42.0	49	43	50.0	58	39	45.3	56
Bexley	39	46.7	53	34	45.8	53	36	47.0	54	33	51.0	65	35	50.7	63
Brent	35	47.1	58	32	45.8	57	32	43.9	55	30	42.6	50	36	48.1	58
Bromley	37	45.6	54	38	48.1	57	39	46.8	54	43	49.8	56	41	48.2	58
Camden	35	43.2	54	37	45.0	53	39	46.6	54	37	46.4	56	33	42.7	57
Croydon	32	41.7	52	26	40.4	54	32	42.8	50	29	45.9	53	36	46.7	55
Ealing	38	46.9	56	41	49.4	57	40	47.9	55	40	48.9	55	44	48.9	57
Greenwich	29	44.7	61	31	45.7	62	38	48.3	63	39	51.4	64	34	47.7	61
Hackney	30	36.3	44	27	34.2	46	29	35.7	53	30	36.2	46	32	38.0	45
Hammersmith and Fulham	40	51.1	59	38	50.5	63	42	52.2	60	44	53.6	63	41	47.2	56
Haringey	35	41.8	50	35	45.3	56	41	50.5	59	37	46.7	59	35	43.9	57
Harrow	43	48.3	56	43	48.6	56	40	46.7	54	45	51.1	58	41	49.2	57
Havering	29	43.6	58	34	44.3	56	33	43.0	52	42	49.2	58	35	45.9	55
Hillingdon	44	55.0	69	41	49.0	61	40	48.4	62	45	52.9	64	42	51.2	62
Hounslow	37	48.6	56	38	46.6	54	39	47.1	59	43	49.1	61	39	45.7	55
Islington	31	38.7	44	32	40.3	50	41	47.4	54	43	46.3	50	37	43.4	51
Kensington and Chelsea	25	32.9	40	32	38.8	47	32	39.5	52	33	42.3	49	30	37.2	51
Kingston-upon-Thames	38	46.2	54	37	46.7	53	39	51.6	60	46	56.5	64	46	53.5	59
Lambeth	25	37.7	50	35	44.8	56	40	47.9	56	35	46.1	55	33	42.7	54
Lewisham	30	44.1	54	25	42.0	53	34	45.9	56	35	45.1	54	30	41.0	50
Merton	37	46.4	55	39	47.5	56	46	49.9	57	46	53.8	60	44	49.7	57
Newham	23	31.0	44	21	31.0	42	24	34.4	48	27	36.1	45	29	37.5	46
Redbridge	36	43.1	48	38	44.6	51	39	44.1	51	41	48.6	55	43	49.0	56
Richmond-upon-Thames	46	58.3	65	53	59.6	66	55	58.9	65	52	59.8	68	48	54.9	60
Southwark	23	32.1	52	20	34.4	53	25	41.1	55	18	40.0	58	20	37.6	56
Sutton	37	50.3	58	37	52.7	63	40	51.8	63	47	56.1	65	40	49.9	61
Tower Hamlets	21	28.8	40	22	33.1	45	31	39.3	48	36	46.4	55	44	53.6	67
Waltham Forest	35	40.9	49	34	43.0	54	37	44.8	51	42	51.1	59	37	45.0	54
Wandsworth	35	45.3	55	40	48.8	57	43	51.6	60	47	56.8	65	45	50.3	58
Westminster	28	35.1	46	28	37.1	47	26	39.0	51	42	51.0	69	30	43.9	61

Table 6.7: The top ten cases of the highest range of turnout at the ward level in a London borough election.

Borough	Year	Mean (%)	Min (%)	Max (%)	Range (%)
Southwark	1990	40.0	18	58	40
Southwark	1994	37.6	20	56	36
Southwark	1982	34.4	20	53	33
Greenwich	1978	44.7	29	61	32
Bexley	1990	51.0	33	65	32
Greenwich	1982	45.7	31	62	31
Westminster	1994	43.9	30	61	31
Southwark	1986	41.1	25	55	30
Havering	1978	43.6	29	58	29
Southwark	1978	32.1	23	52	29

What this initial analysis has shown us is that there is quite a wide variation in the level of turnout across the wards and even between wards within a borough. At the borough level, these variations in turnout rates are hidden, hence, it is important to focus down to the ward level. In order to explain this variation in turnout, we need to investigate all the possible determinants of turnout to see which variables are influential. Hypotheses are tested at the ward level using the same three types of explanatory variables: political, structural and socio-economic that were used at the borough level. We begin by examining the importance of political and structural variables.

6.7: Testing the relationship between turnout and single/multi-member wards in London.

The first structural hypothesis to test is the relationship between turnout and the number of vacancies in a ward (VACS). In the London data-set, there are 79 single-member wards while the remaining wards have either two or three vacancies. We have hypothesised in section 3.7 that turnout is likely to be higher in single-member wards. The results in Table 6.8 show that turnout is higher in single-member wards in every election than it is in multi-member wards. On average, turnout is more than five percentage points higher when the number of vacancies equals one rather than two or three. Of course, these high rates of

turnout in single-member wards may be the result of the socio-economic composition, the geographical location of these wards, or possibly the size of the electorate. This latter point shall be examined in the next section.

Table 6.8: The level of turnout according to single- and multi- member wards in London.

	Vacs=1	Vacs=2	Vacs=3
1978	47.7 (16)	44.3 (292)	42.1 (414)
1982	49.4 (16)	44.6 (292)	43.2 (414)
1986	50.7 (16)	46.2 (291)	44.9 (415)
1990	54.6 (16)	48.6 (292)	47.9 (414)
1994	52.4 (15)	46.4 (295)	45.6 (412)
Mean	51.0 (79)	46.0 (1462)	44.7 (2069)

6.8: Testing the relationship between turnout and size of ward electorates in London.

We have hypothesised in section 3.7 that we expect to find an inverse relationship between the level of turnout and electorate size. There are a number of reasons which lend support to this view. Firstly, the electorate may experience a greater sense of identity in a small area and this could motivate them to participate in a local election. Also, if the size of the ward is small enough, which it can be in local elections, the personal popularity of the candidate could sway the final outcome. Another reason why turnout may be higher in a small area is the fact that a potential voter may be encouraged to vote by secondary agencies, such as the campaigning and canvassing of the local party organisations. Generally, the smaller the size of a ward, the easier it is for candidates and parties to campaign.

At the London borough level, we examined the elector:ward ratio and found that there seemed to be no relationship between this variable and the level of turnout (Table 5.2). This analysis used the average size of wards within boroughs, however, rather than the 'real' figures at the ward level. We will now investigate using the 'real' figures whether the size of the electorate in a ward affects turnout.

The variable that measures the size of the ward electorate (ELECT) was recoded into a number of categories, and we compared the turnout rates against each size grouping over the five elections. The results in Table 6.9 show that turnout was nearly always higher in those wards with less than 4,000 electors than in the other categories. The average rate of turnout was very similar for the four categories that included wards with electorates more than 4,000 people. The turnout in the smallest sized grouping was on average more than two percentage points higher than the averages for the four other categories. This would seem to suggest that the smallest sized wards produce the highest rates of turnout, but the relationship does not appear to be very strong.

Table 6.9: The level of turnout according to the size of the electorate in London wards.

	Less than 4,000	4,000 -6,000	6,001 -8,000	8,001 -9,000	More than 9,000
1978	46.2 (35)	43.4 (231)	43.2 (258)	42.1 (98)	41.8 (100)
1982	45.7 (38)	43.7 (244)	43.7 (244)	43.8 (106)	44.1 (81)
1986	47.2 (43)	46.1 (241)	45.2 (234)	44.7 (105)	45.3 (99)
1990	51.0 (67)	48.5 (237)	47.6 (230)	47.2 (102)	48.9 (86)
1994	46.3 (62)	46.2 (259)	46.1 (242)	45.0 (80)	46.4 (79)
Mean	47.3 (245)	45.6 (1212)	45.2 (1217)	44.6 (491)	46.4 (445)

The next stage was to examine the relationship between turnout and the elector:councillor ratio (CRATIO). As with all variables measuring the size of the electorate, we would expect an inverse relationship with turnout. The analysis was carried out in two stages. Firstly, we grouped the ratio into a number of categories and examined the turnout in the 79 cases of single-member wards. The second stage involved following the same procedure for the multi-member wards.

The results of the analysis of CRATIO and turnout in the few single-member wards show that, on average, turnout is highest in the category containing the smallest sized elector:councillor ratios ('Less than 2,000') at 56.9%. The relationship is not at all strong,

however, because the turnout in the category containing the largest elector:councillor ratios is only slightly lower than 56.9% at 53.7%. It is difficult to make any generalisations from the results, as there are only a very small number of cases where one councillor represents a ward.

Table 6.10 shows that there does not seem to be a relationship between turnout and the elector:councillor ratio in multi-member wards. On average, the rate of turnout is highest in the 'More than 3,300' category, which is a result opposed to our hypothesis. If we compare the results in Table 6.10 to the figures when there is only one vacancy in a ward, it shows that turnout is more than twelve percentage points higher in single-member wards with an elector:councillor ratio less than 2,000 people. Turnout is also higher in single-member wards where there is a elector:councillor ratio of more than 3,300 people than in any category in the multi-member wards. On the other hand, we find that turnout is lower in single-member wards with a CRATIO in the '2,000-2,400' category, than it is for the same category in multi-member wards. We can conclude from these results that the level of turnout does not seem to be affected by the elector:councillor ratio in multi-member wards.

Table 6.10: The level of turnout according to the elector-councillor ratio in multi-member wards in London.

	Less than 2,000	2,000 -2,400	2,401 -2,700	2,701 -3,300	More than 3,300
1978	43.0 (36)	42.6 (184)	43.1 (185)	43.2 (213)	43.4 (88)
1982	41.0 (50)	43.9 (187)	43.2 (189)	44.4 (204)	45.1 (75)
1986	44.6 (58)	45.7 (173)	45.4 (182)	45.4 (214)	45.4 (80)
1990	49.8 (94)	48.2 (179)	47.5 (172)	47.4 (199)	50.1 (62)
1994	44.5 (94)	45.9 (216)	46.4 (181)	45.6 (153)	47.6 (63)
Mean	44.6 (332)	45.9 (939)	45.1 (909)	45.2 (983)	46.3 (368)

London is a difficult area to measure the importance of electorate size on the level of turnout, because when re-warding took place, the government set the elector:councillor ratio at

approximately the same level across the whole of London. Our analysis shows that over 80% of wards have a councillor-elector ratio of one elected member for every 2-3,000 of the population. This means that there is little variation in the size of ward electorates available to study. Finally, the ratio of the electorate to councillors in Britain (1:1,800) in very high compared to our European neighbours. France for example, has an elected official for every 110 of the electorate, while the average ratio in other Western countries is between 1:250 and 1:450. The Commission for Local Democracy argued that, 'On this definition, Britain is one of the least democratic democracies in the world' (1995:8).

6.9: Testing the relationship between turnout and party competition in London wards.

The first hypothesis using political variables concerns the relationship between the number of major political parties in a ward contest (MAJOR) and turnout. The Conservative party, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats are defined as being the major political parties. This means that MAJOR has a range of between one and three. We have suggested in section 3.6.1 that the greater the number of major parties in a contest, the higher the rate of turnout. This belief is based on many factors, including the increased strength of campaigning that an extra party brings and that a potential voter is being offered more choice.

Local government elections are now highly politicised affairs, especially in London. It is not surprising, therefore, to find just 28 wards that had only one major political party contesting. Of course, this does not mean that only one political party contested the election, but only one party that is defined as being 'major'. On average, the turnout in these contests was a modest 35.9%. This figure was to be expected for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is likely that these wards have been dominated in the past by one party. Other parties may have decided that the election was a lost cause and concentrated their resources elsewhere. Some of the electorate may not have voted because a full range of parties across the ideological

spectrum was not offered. Potential voters could also have abstained because, like some of the parties, they assumed that the contest would be a political walk-over.

The results in Table 6.11 seem to confirm our hypothesis of a positive relationship between turnout and the number of major parties in a contest. Turnout is higher in every election where three major parties were involved rather than when only one or two major parties competed, with one exception when the turnout was 51.2% in a ward in 1994 where only one major party competed. On average, the turnout in three party contests was 46.5% against 40.1% when two major parties competed. It seems from these results that the addition of the Liberal Democrats to a contest where Labour and the Conservatives are competing in a ward, has a positive effect on the level of turnout.

Table 6.11: The level of turnout according to the number of major parties in London ward elections.

	Major=1	Major=2	Major=3
1978	33.1 (14)	39.6 (283)	45.8 (428)
1982	24.4 (5)	33.1 (50)	44.8 (665)
1986	25.9 (3)	39.3 (28)	45.9 (691)
1990	44.8 (5)	45.4 (195)	49.4 (522)
1994	51.2 (1)	43.1 (94)	46.5 (627)
Mean	35.9 (28)	40.1 (650)	46.5 (2932)

It seems that party competition, as measured by the variable MAJOR, could be an influential determinant of turnout. We must be cautious of reading too much into the figures, because although we may see that three major parties are contesting an election, one or even two of these parties could be putting up 'paper candidates'. The turnout will, therefore, be lower than what we would have expected it to be if all three parties were competing for a win. We must also recognise that in the two party elections, the actual parties have not been specified. There are three permutations of two party contests: Conservative versus Labour or the Liberal Democrats, and Labour versus the Liberal Democrats. The level of turnout may vary

according to which parties are competing against each other and how tight the contests are. We analysed the figures to see if turnout varied according to the different combinations of two major parties competing in a ward. The results showed that there was less than one percentage point difference in the average rates of turnout between those contests where Labour and the Liberal Democrats were the two major parties, and those where Labour and the Conservatives were the major parties. There were no cases of two major parties competing that did not involve the Labour party.

Another potential area to investigate within the general topic of party competition, is to examine the effect upon the rate of turnout when one political party is dominant in a ward election. Table 6.12 shows that there is a clear pattern to indicate the higher the Labour share of the vote (LABSH) once they have more than 50% of the vote, the lower the level of turnout. With one exception in 1994, when turnout is slightly higher in the 'More than 80%' category than it is in the '70.1-80%' grouping, the level of turnout declined as the share of the vote for Labour increased. This potential relationship will be further tested by the correlation analysis between these two variables in section 6.11.

Table 6.12: The level of turnout according to the Labour party share of the vote in London wards.

	50-60%	60.1-70%	70.1-80%	More than 80%
1978	41.4 (136)	35.3 (110)	31.3 (30)	28.5 (6)
1982	37.3 (87)	34.1 (43)	29.3 (10)	24.3 (1)
1986	43.4 (116)	39.9 (66)	35.8 (28)	35.7 (6)
1990	45.4 (137)	42.7 (66)	39.1 (30)	36.4 (14)
1994	45.1 (126)	41.6 (97)	39.2 (42)	39.7 (17)
Mean	42.5 (602)	38.7 (382)	34.9 (140)	32.9 (44)

Table 6.13 shows that the relationship between the Conservative share of the vote (CONSH) and the level of turnout is in the same direction as it was for the Labour party support. Generally, as the share of the vote for this party increases from 50%, the level of turnout

falls. The main difference between the results in Tables 6.12 and 6.13 is that the levels of turnout are on average more than five percentage points higher when the Conservatives have a high share of the vote rather than when Labour receive more than 50% of the vote. These results were to be expected, because we found at the local authority level in London (Table 5.4) that turnout was always lower in those boroughs where Labour were the largest party in the borough in the previous election rather than the Conservatives.

Table 6.13: The level of turnout according to the Conservative party share of the vote in London wards.

	50-60%	60.1-70%	70.1-80%	More than 80%
1978	48.3 (125)	46.0 (89)	44.8 (67)	44.9 (18)
1982	48.3 (112)	45.6 (77)	46.3 (29)	45.4 (2)
1986	45.8 (84)	43.0 (43)	39.5 (11)	34.9 (1)
1990	52.3 (97)	49.1 (51)	47.6 (23)	45.3 (1)
1994	48.6 (72)	44.0 (28)	37.7 (8)	
Mean	48.7 (490)	45.5 (288)	43.2 (138)	42.6 (22)

Finally, the relationship between the Liberal Democrat share of the vote (CENSH) and turnout was investigated. The results in Table 6.14 show that there does not seem to be any identifiable relationship between the Liberal Democrat share of the vote and the level of turnout. The average turnout figures indicate that where the Liberal Democrats are successful and receive more than 50% of the vote, the level of turnout is considerably higher than in wards where the Conservative and Labour parties are similarly successful. This may be the result of the Liberal Democrats targeting their canvassing in wards that they think they can win. As there are only a small number of cases at the upper echelons of the vote share for this party, however, it is difficult to come to any significant conclusions from these data.

Table 6.14: The level of turnout according to the Liberal Democrat share of the vote in London wards.

	50-60%	60.1-70%	70.1-80%	More than 80%
1978	54.9 (4)	38.6 (1)		
1982	42.3 (13)	46.4 (7)		
1986	51.1 (39)	50.9 (6)		
1990	52.1 (26)	52.8 (15)		
1994	49.9 (41)	47.7 (24)	49.8 6)	48.2 (1)
Mean	50.1 (123)	47.3 (53)	49.8 (6)	48.2 (1)

6.10: Testing the relationship between turnout and previous marginality in London wards.

There is a long running discussion on the influence of marginality on the level of turnout at general elections (Newton, 1972, Denver and Hands, 1974). There is no consensus on the importance of this variable in local elections. Fletcher (1969) found from his research that there was a relationship between marginality and turnout: the smaller the margin, the higher the turnout. Some authors have opposed this view with Newton, for example, arguing that,

> 'high or low turnout has little or nothing to do with marginality and that, in any case, there is no good theoretical case to believe that marginality should be strongly related to turnout, although it may be related to changes in turnout' (1972:252).

So, what evidence can we find at the ward level to either support or refute these views? The variable MAJORITY was initially used as a surrogate indicator of marginality. It was defined as the percentage lead of the winning candidate over the second placed candidate, and had a range in our data-set of between 0.02% and 84.6%. It was thought that we could look at the marginality in an election, and then examine the effect that this close contest had on the level of turnout in the same election. The results of the analysis showed us that MAJORITY seemed to be an important factor in influencing turnout, because the level of turnout decreased as the variable MAJORITY increased. Hence, the safer the election, the lower the level of turnout. In reality, however, how salient is the consideration that the contest will be close in the mind of a potential voter? In fact, how does a voter know

whether the election will be close? Perhaps, they may have read some of the party political literature that discussed the case of the election being close and that could have influenced the decision to vote? It seems that this is quite an unlikely prospect, however, because the local propaganda often places greater emphasis on the expected closeness of the overall borough, or even the national contest rather than specifically on the ward in question. It seems to be unlikely that even a well informed rational person will turn out to vote just on the basis that the contest may end up being a close run event, with no regard of the previous behaviour of the ward.

So, there is a problem with the operationalisation of this variable and there is no consensus on which definition to use. It was thought that the only real basis that a voter has to make a decision upon, is the closeness of the ward contest in the last election. The next step was to see if there was a relationship between the marginality in the previous election (MARGIN) and the rate of turnout in the following election. For the 1978 election, we used the figures for the closeness of the contest in this election as the measure for marginality. We could not refer to the previous contests in 1974 because we would have been comparing wards that were not identical because of re-organisation.

Our hypothesis for the MARGIN variable was that the lower the majority in the previous election, the higher the turnout in the following election. The previous marginality variable was recoded into a number of categories and a table was produced of the level of turnout according to the closeness of the previous contest. The results in Table 6.15 show that although there is little difference in the turnout levels when the previous marginality variable is less than 25%, there does seem to be a stronger relationship between these two variables when the previous contest is 'very safe' (a margin of more than 35%) for a party. For example, except for one instance, turnout is always higher when the previous marginality is less than 5% ('very marginal') than the turnout figures for any other marginality category in every election. When the average turnout figures at the extreme ends of the marginality scale are compared, the relationship seems to be at its strongest. Turnout is, on average, more

than six percentage points higher where the previous contests were very marginal (less than 5% difference in party share), compared to when the last election was won by a party with more than a 35% lead.

Table 6.15: The level of turnout according to the previous marginality of wards in London.

	Less than 5%	5-10%	10.1-15%	15.1-25%	25.1-35%	More than 35%
1978		43.6 (78)	42.3 (63)	44.7 (156)	44.5 (121)	40.9 (221)
1982	47.0 (74)	45.4 (85)	46.2 (71)	45.9 (121)	43.2 (116)	41.6 (252)
1986	49.6 (90)	47.9 (93)	48.4 (85)	45.5 (148)	44.7 (132)	41.7 (172)
1990	51.9 (108)	51.6 (84)	49.7 (81)	49.5 (161)	47.6 (115)	43.2 (171)
1994	49.9 (78)	49.5 (97)	48.2 (87)	46.3 (156)	44.9 (122)	42.1 (179)
Mean	48.6 (431)	47.6 (437)	47.0 (387)	46.4 (742)	45.0 (606)	41.9 (995)

To examine the relationship between turnout and previous marginality in more detail, a cross-tabulation was carried out between the two variables. The results in Table 6.16 show that of the wards which had a majority of less than 5% at election in 1986, 87% of them had a turnout greater than 45% at the next election in 1990. Similarly, 81% of wards which had a previous marginality of less than 5% in 1990, had a turnout of more than 45% in 1994. Conversely, when the previous marginality was large, for example, greater than 35% in 1990, 35% of wards had a turnout greater than 45% in 1994. Overall, these results imply that there is an inverse relationship between turnout and previous marginality with the effect on turnout being most noticeable when previous marginality is very small at less than 5%.

Table 6.16: Cross-tabulation between turnout and previous marginality in London wards.

	Margin less than 5% Percentage of cases with turnout greater than 45%	Margin greater than 35% Percentage of cases with turnout greater than 45%
1978	44	36
1982	60	38
1986	75	35
1990	87	42
1994	81	35

6.11: Correlations between political/structural variables and turnout in London wards.

The next stage in the analysis of turnout was to conduct correlations between the political and structural variables and the dependent variable, turnout. This procedure was carried out in every election and the results can be seen in Table 6.17. We can not come to any conclusions about the determinants of voter turnout at the ward level from the correlations, but we can provide evidence to support our earlier hypotheses.

The first point to note from the figures in Table 6.17 is that there are positive correlation coefficients in every election between turnout and the party share of the vote for the Liberal Democrats (CENSH) and the Conservatives (CONSH). The results of the correlations between turnout and the Labour share of the vote (LABSH) were in the opposite direction to the other party variables. LABSH produced an overall average correlation of -.48, which means that the higher the Labour share of the vote in a ward election, the lower the level of turnout.

Four other political/structural variables that stand out in the results of the correlations, are the variables measuring population density (POPD), the number of vacancies (VACS), the party competition variable (MAJOR) and the previous marginality variable (MARGIN). The variable measuring population density produced negative correlations that were significant in every election. Hence, the wards with the greatest amount of population per area are likely to produce low levels of turnout. The variable, VACS produced negative correlation coefficients in every election. This result supports our early examination of this variable in section 6.7 which suggested that turnout will be higher in single-member wards than in multi-member wards. MAJOR also produced five significant correlations with turnout but they were positive in every election. This result also concurs with our earlier hypothesis in section 6.9 which suggested that there is likely to be a positive relationship between the number of parties and the level of turnout. The more parties that contest an election, the higher the rate of turnout. Finally, the variable measuring previous marginality (MARGIN)

produced negative correlation coefficients in every election. This means that, other things being equal, the closer the contest in the previous ward election, the higher the turnout in the following election.

We can suggest at this stage of analysis that some political/structural variables are potentially important determinants of turnout. VACS, MAJOR and MARGIN for instance, seem to be salient variables. There may, however, be other variables that are more important when all the independent variables are taken into consideration together. For example, the impact of the two political variables, MAJOR and MARGIN, on the level of turnout, may reflect the socio-economic composition of the wards in question. We will have to wait until the regression analysis in section 6.13 to find out if this is correct.

Table 6.17: Correlation coefficients produced between political/structural variables and turnout in London wards.

	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994
CENSH	.36	.26	.32	.31	.25
CONSH	.44	.48	.22	.33	.21
ELECT	-.08				
GREENSH		.11		-.17	-.14
INDSH					-.11
LABSH	-.52	-.56	-.37	-.56	-.39
MARGIN	-.15	-.20	-.38	-.45	-.43
MAJOR	.39	.41	.24	.24	.16
OTHSH	-.19	-.08	-.09		
POPD	-.36	-.31	-.15	-.26	-.28
VACS	-.14	-.11	-.12	-.10	-.11

(Only the figures which achieved significance at the 5% level or above are included).
(See Chapter 3 for the definition for these variables).

6.12: Correlations between socio-economic variables and turnout in London wards.

The correlations between turnout and the political/structural variables suggest some possible relationships, the next stage of analysis was to investigate the importance of the variables derived from the census. The hypothesis proposed for this section is that the more middle-

class a ward the higher the level of turnout. In contrast, we would expect those wards defined as working-class to produce low levels of turnout. Hence, we would expect positive correlations between turnout and SEG1, SEG2, SEG3N and owner-occupier variables and negative coefficients between the variables measuring council housing, SEG3M, SEG4, SEG5, unemployment, having no bath, no access to a car and no exclusive use of a toilet. The results in Table 6.18 confirmed our hypothesis as all the directional signs from the correlations were correct. The correlation coefficients between turnout and the owner-occupier variable, for example, were positive in each election and produced an overall average coefficient of .51. Conversely, the variable measuring the extent of council house tenants in a ward was negative in every election and produced an average figure of -.44.

The correlations between all the socio-economic groupings and turnout also produced expected results. The correlation coefficients for the SEG1 and SEG2 variables were positive in every election, while the SEG4 and SEG5 variables produced polar opposite results. The variable with the highest correlation coefficients was the unemployment variable. Its average correlation with turnout over the five elections was -.55. The measure for unemployment at the borough level was also an important determinant, so the results seem to be consistent.

Two surrogate indicators of income also produced some important results. The variables measuring overcrowding (OVERCRO), and the percentage of households which have no access to a car (NOCAR) gave average correlation coefficients of -.44 and -.51 respectively. The results of the latter correlation, however, should be examined alongside the fact that the transport infra-structure in London means that there is not really a need for a car in the same way as there is in other areas in Britain. Not having a car in London may not necessarily be a sign of low income. Finally, negative correlation coefficients were produced between the variable measuring the number of migrants in a ward and the level of turnout. This variable was defined as the number of people in a ward who had a different address one year before

the census. Two pieces of research that were discussed in Chapter 2 (Crewe *et al.* (1977) and Swaddle and Heath (1989)) suggested that non-voting is higher than average for those people who have recently moved, therefore, a negative relationship was expected between the MIGRANTS variable and turnout. The result is indicative of the non-stable population in wards in general. The variable is not a measure of class or deprivation.

Although we could suggest from our positive correlation coefficients between turnout and variables indicating a middle-class ward, and negative correlation coefficients produced between turnout and variables indicating working-class wards, that turnout will be higher in middle class wards than it is in working class wards, there are a couple of drawbacks with this simple conclusion. Firstly, how do we define a middle-class or working-class ward. We have used variables from the census to indicate aspects of a middle-class ward (for example, a high proportion of owner occupiers and a large percentage belonging to the SEG1 and SEG2), but our definition of these types of wards are somewhat arbitrary. Secondly, we should really only limit our interpretation of the results of using census data to comparison and description, rather than attempting to generalise and explain, because of the problem of the 'ecological fallacy'. To conclude this section we can say that the results signify that the social variables can also be important determinants of turnout alongside the political/structural variables. All three types of variables, political, structural and socio-economic, should, therefore, always be considered together when attempting to explain the variation in local election turnout.

Table 6.18: Correlation coefficients produced between socio-economic variables and turnout in London wards.

	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994
AGRIC	.21	.19	.15	.19	.15
COUNCIL	-.49	-.53	-.34	-.44	-.39
MIGRANTS	-.19	-.11	-.10	-.10	-.20
NCWP	-.24	-.24	-.31	-.48	-.28
NOBATH	-.29	-.26	-.14	-.20	-.19
NOCAR	-.60	-.55	-.39	-.52	-.50
NOEXWC	-.24	-.15	-.11	-.21	-.24
OAP	.16	.20	.18	.36	.23
OVERCRO	-.47	-.47	-.41	-.52	-.32
OWNOCC	.59	.57	.38	.49	.51
SEG1	.34	.42	.26	.31	.19
SEG2	.31	.38	.23	.29	.19
SEG3M	-.14	-.22	-.13	-.11	
SEG3N	.16	.21		.08	
SEG4	-.47	-.49	-.32	-.39	-.28
SEG5	-.52	-.50	-.30	-.39	-.32
STUDENT			-.12	-.13	-.20
UNEMP	-.63	-.61	-.41	-.62	-.51
YOUTH	-.46	-.46	-.21	-.34	-.36

(Only the figures which achieved significance at the 5% level or above are included).
(See Chapter 3 for the definition of these variables).

6.13: Multivariate analysis of turnout using the political and structural variables in London wards.

The regression analysis at the London borough level in Chapter 5 using just the political and structural variables, resulted in only three variables entering into the regression equation. A surrogate measure of marginality (NOCOUN) was the most important variable entering into the regression equation in five elections. At the ward level in London, a total of eleven variables entered into the regression equations. Table 6.19 shows that when all the political and structural variables are considered together, the coefficient of determination (r^2) figure varies between 36% in 1978 and 1994 to 49% in 1982. The average r^2 figure using just the political and structural variables was 41%. The election of 1982 produced the best regression equation to explain the variation in turnout. The results show that LABSH was

the first variable to enter explaining 34% of the variation in turnout. The second best explanatory variable was MARGIN explaining an additional 10% of the variation in turnout. The remaining r^2 of 5% was achieved when the variables, VACS and MAJOR also entered into the regression equation.

The variables measuring previous marginality (MARGIN), the percentage Labour share of the vote (LABSH) and the number of vacancies (VACS) entered into the regression equation in every election. This means that they all act independently to explain the variation in turnout. Generalising from the results in Table 6.19, we can suggest that as VACS is a surrogate for multi-member wards, we can expect to find single-member wards with a close contest in the previous election and a low level of support for the Labour party to have high rates of turnout.

Table 6.19: Explaining the variation in turnout using the political and structural variables in London wards.

	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994
LABSH	-.52	-.57	-.48	-.46	-.31
OTHSH	-.15		-.12		
POPD	-.15	-.07			-.11
CONSH	-.16				
VACS	-.16	-.18	-.29	-.12	-.14
MAJOR	.11	.15			
MARGIN	-.10	-.32	-.45	-.35	-.40
ELECT			-.10		
NUMCAND			.23		
GREENSH				-.10	-.08
INDSH					-.09
Constant	62.6	52.1	63.9	64.9	60.9
r^2 (%)	36	49	41	45	36

6.14: Multivariate analysis of turnout using the socio-economic variables in London wards.

A regression analysis was then conducted using only the socio-economic variables. Table 6.20 shows that the amount of variation in the dependent variable explained by these independent variables was similar in magnitude to the results from the regression output using just the political and structural variables. The lowest r^2 of 28% was produced for the 1986 election, while the elections of 1978, 1982 and 1990 each provided the best result of 47%. Overall, the average r^2 figure was 41%, which is exactly the same result as we found in section 6.13. Taking the 1978 election as an example, the variable measuring unemployment was the first variable to enter. It explained 40% of the variation in turnout. A further 7% was explained by the addition of another other five census variables into the regression equation.

Sixteen census variables in total were entered into the regression equations at least once with unemployment being the best explanatory variable of turnout variation. Making inferences from all the equations suggests that wards with high levels of unemployment, a large proportion of the electorate in the socio-economic group 3M and a small number of owner occupiers are likely to have low levels of turnout.

Table 6.20: Explaining the variation in turnout using the socio-economic variables in London wards.

	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994
UNEMP	-.45	-.35		-.44	-.51
YOUTH	-.21	-.27			
NCWP	.26	.19		-.13	
SEG4	-.22	-.16			
AGRIC	.09	.09	.11	.09	.06
NOBATH	-.08				
SEG3M		-.17	-.29	-.33	-.26
OWNOCC		.11	.53	.61	.69
MIGRANTS		.14		.14	-.15
STUDENT			-.19	-.18	-.21
SEG1			.13		
OVERCRO			-.18		.31
NOCAR			.26	.50	.29
NOEXWC				-.15	
COUNCIL					-.25
SEG2					.21
Constant	65.1	64.8	37.5	41.4	36.8
r^2 (%)	**47**	**47**	**28**	**47**	**38**

6.15: Multivariate analysis of turnout using all the independent variables in London wards.

When the political and structural variables were examined on their own, the Labour share of the vote, the number of vacancies in a ward and the marginality of the previous contest were the most important variables. The regression of the socio-economic variables showed us that the level of unemployment was the best explanatory variable. The next step was to see how much of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained when all the variables are added into the stepwise regression. Table 6.21 shows that each regression equation explained more than half of the variation in turnout. The lowest r^2 of 55% was produced in 1978 and 1986, while a figure of 64% resulted from the election in 1982. The first variable to enter the regression equation in 1982 was MARGIN explaining 43% of the variation in the dependent variable. The NOCAR variable explained a further 10% when it was the

second variable to enter into the equation. Another thirteen variables entered into the regression equation in this election which brought the r^2 up to 64%.

The importance of some of the political and structural variables can be illustrated by their appearances in the regression equations. Variables such as the size of the ward electorate, the number of major parties in a contest and the marginality of the previous contest, continue to be influential and enter the regression equations a number of times. It is the socio-economic variables, however, that are the more influential determinants of turnout when all the variables are considered together. Some variables that were important when the different types of variables were considered separately are no longer as influential. It seems, for example, that it is not the fact that Labour is dominant in a ward (LABSH) which produces the low level of turnout, but it is likely that the social composition of the ward generates these political results. This means that a safe ward for Labour is likely to be one where there are high levels of unemployment, a large proportion of manual workers (SEG3M) and a low percentage of owner occupiers.

The regression using all the independent variables at the borough level in London found a highest r^2 of 63%, which is virtually the same as the figure found in the London wards. Not only is there some consistency with the r^2 figures, but the same variables seem to be influential. The analysis at the borough level suggested that variables such as unemployment and previous marginality are important determinants and this was confirmed by the results at the ward level. A model of turnout, or any attempt to model behaviour in a social science is never going to achieve an r^2 figure of 100%, a result nearing 100% would lead a researcher into thinking that some substantive mistake had been made. An r^2 of 64% in 1982 is a good result to find as it means the regression equation at its best leaves just over a third of the variation in turnout unexplained. It is hoped that by analysing the residuals and using a range of qualitative research techniques, the r^2 may be improved.

Table 6.21: Explaining the variation in turnout using all the independent variables in London wards.

	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994
UNEMP	-.26			-.46	-.31
ELECT	-.62	-.63	-.16	-.08	-.28
CENSH	.12	.09	.14	.15	.09
NCWP	.22	.21			
AGRIC	.10	.07		.07	.05
SEG3N	.18	.20			
MARGIN	-.07	-.31	-.44	-.32	-.41
INDSH	.05				
NOCAR	-.41	-.45			
OAP	.25	.21			
NUMCAND	.18		.29		
LABSH	.18				
SEG2	.15	.26			.28
SEG3M	.22		-.24	-.31	-.18
VACS	-.13		-.24		
SEG1	.15	.20	.20		
MAJOR		.16			.07
YOUTH		-.09	-.09		-.10
SEG5		.12			
COUNCIL		.23			.20
OWNOCC		.24	.39	.20	.52
STUDENT			-.12	-.14	-.19
POPD			.18	.21	.07
NOBATH			-.07		
OVERCRO			-.09		.42
NOEXWC			-.08	-.12	-.13
OTHSH			-.08	-.08	.06
MIGRANTS				.09	
Constant	48.9	38.4	52.1	57.6	45.5
r^2 (%)	55	64	55	60	57

6.16: Analysing the residuals in London wards.

We have explained in Chapter 1 (section 1.4) that the cases which produce levels of turnout either above or below that predicted by the regression equation are called residuals. In the London wards, we decided to examine those cases that have standardised residuals greater than +/- two and a half. By examining those wards that are furthest away from fitting into

the regression equation, we may be able to discover the reasons for their behaviour and could possibly generalise from these cases for all residual wards.

The analysis of residuals was carried out in every election between 1978 and 1994. A total of 41 residuals were discovered, 25 of these wards had a level of turnout higher than expected, while sixteen wards had a level of turnout lower than the values predicted by the regression equation. Table 6.22 shows the distribution of the residual wards by election year. Sixteen London boroughs had at least one ward that was an outlier in this analysis. This means that the outlier wards were concentrated in some boroughs while other boroughs played no part at all. For example, three wards from the borough of Hillingdon were residuals in the election of 1978 with levels of turnout higher than the figures expected. Secondly, there are three wards from Hammersmith and Fulham (Sulivan in 1982 and Palace and White City and Shepherd's Bush in 1990), with turnout again greater than predicted by the regression equation. A representative from the council reports that Hammersmith and Fulham is a borough of mirror images. Just as Palace ward in the far south will unlikely elect anything other than a true-blue Tory, the northern White City and Shepherd's Bush ward is as safe an inner-city Labour area as anywhere in the United Kingdom. The high turnout in the Sulivan ward is discussed later on in this section.

At the other end of the turnout scale, the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea had five cases of residuals in three different elections with turnouts lower than expected. These residual wards are Church in 1978, Brompton in 1990 and Royal Hospital, Brompton and North Stanley in 1994. As this example illustrates, it is possible for a ward (Brompton) to appear as a residual on more than one occasion. There are four other wards that are residuals in more than one election. River (Barking and Dagenham, lower than expected turnout in 1986 and 1990), Roehampton (Wandsworth, higher than expected turnout in 1986 and 1990), Abbey (Southwark, lower than expected turnout in 1990 and 1994) and Churchill (Westminster, higher than expected turnout in 1990 and 1994) make up these residual wards.

Table 6.22: The residual wards more than +/- two and a half two standard deviations away from the line of best fit.

Year	Ward	Borough	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1978	Ickenham	Hillingdon	69	50.9	18.0
	Hillingdon North	Hillingdon	62	46.8	15.5
	Ruislip	Hillingdon	66	50.9	15.2
	Church	Kensington and Chelsea	32	48.4	-16.1
	Bemerside	Newham	27	40.8	-14.2
	Barnes	Richmond-upon-Thames	64	48.2	16.0
	Cavendish	Westminster	28	43.0	-14.8
1982	Sulivan	Hammersmith and Fulham	63	48.8	13.8
	Hill	Kingston-upon-Thames	47	60.7	-13.5
1986	Eastbrook	Barking and Dagenham	33	45.1	-12.5
	River	Barking and Dagenham	31	44.8	-13.4
	Fryent	Brent	55	41.8	13.0
	Springfield	Hackney	53	40.1	12.7
	Hounslow South	Hounslow	53	39.0	14.3
	Surbiton Hill	Kingston-upon-Thames	39	52.1	-13.3
	Roehampton	Wandsworth	54	37.7	16.3
1990	River	Barking and Dagenham	33	46.9	-14.4
	Heathfield	Croydon	29	48.9	-20.2
	Palace	Hammersmith and Fulham	63	50.5	12.6
	White City and S. Bush	Hammersmith and Fulham	47	34.0	12.9
	Brompton	Kensington and Chelsea	33	46.1	-13.1
	Burlington	Kingston-upon-Thames	61	45.7	15.0
	Ham and Petersham	Richmond-upon-Thames	65	53.1	12.3
	Abbey	Southwark	37	49.1	-12.3
	Fairfield	Wandsworth	65	50.7	14.0
	Latchmere	Wandsworth	53	40.3	13.1
	Roehampton	Wandsworth	57	43.1	13.7
	Churchill	Westminster	69	49.2	19.3
	Maida Vale	Westminster	61	47.7	12.8
1994	Thames	Barking and Dagenham	47	32.2	14.3
	Bruce Grove	Haringey	57	41.5	15.2
	Royal Hospital	Kensington and Chelsea	32	44.4	-12.7
	Brompton	Kensington and Chelsea	30	42.9	-12.9
	North Stanley	Kensington and Chelsea	34	47.1	-13.3
	Alleyn	Southwark	32	45.9	-13.7
	Abbey	Southwark	35	47.1	-11.8
	Millwall	Tower Hamlets	67	42.2	24.3
	Holy Trinity	Tower Hamlets	58	44.0	12.2
	Lansbury	Tower Hamlets	57	44.0	12.2
	St. Dunstans	Tower Hamlets	52	39.0	13.2
	Churchill	Westminster	61	49.0	11.8

Details on the reasons why turnout in particular wards is especially high or low are very difficult to find. This is because we often need much more information than the result of the elections and the social data from the census. What is needed is local knowledge of the wards in question. This sort of detail can often only be attained through investigative research of resources such as local and national newspapers produced at the time of the election and interviewing local people who may have specialised information. In Hillingdon, for example, what reasons can be suggested for three wards with higher than expected levels of turnout in 1978? In 1974, the borough was controlled by Labour with 42 seats to the Conservatives 28. The situation just four years later was extremely different. The Conservatives are now in power with 55 seats, with the Labour party trailing with only fourteen seats. In 1974, the turnout in the borough was 40.8%, but this jumped to 50.7% in 1978. Were the results of the election just a reflection of anti-government feeling that is frequently found in local elections, or was there something special happening in the borough which caused an extra 10% to turn out at the polls?

There were many controversial issues surrounding the elections in Hillingdon in 1978 and it seems that these issues, specific to the local area, could have influenced the rate of turnout. One of the most significant local issues related to the housing of immigrants. The Labour council, under what was described by the local media as the flamboyant and controversial leadership of Mr. John Bartlett, were housing immigrant families in homes that were 'compulsory purchased' for this particular reason. This action was criticised for a number of reasons. Firstly, the opposition and some sections of the media saw the action as political - the party was accused of bringing Labour supporters in. Secondly, these homes for immigrants were frequently in the plusher areas of the borough, e.g. Northwood (61% turnout in 1978), and this provoked complaints from residents. Finally, there was a racial element to the issue. Terry Dicks, who was Chairman of the borough's Housing Committee paid for a taxi to take an Asian family of five from the borough to the Foreign Office because he claimed that it was the responsibility of the Foreign Office to house them. He argued, 'It is a national problem and should be dealt with nationally. The rate payers of Hillingdon are

fed up with picking up the tab' (The Times, 8/11/78). A final factor contributing towards increased turnout was the presence of nine National Front candidates in the 1978 borough election.

An analysis of individual wards in Hillingdon also provide further information. Ickenham ward, for example, is a well established, some may even describe it as a 'desirable' place to live. It is a typical commuter belt area, where the local electoral registration officer said that the electorate is well aware of their democratic rights and use them accordingly. It is not a place where there is any need for door-knocking. Even if the electorate in the ward needed some encouragement to vote, the local political parties are described as being well organised. Both Ickenham and Hillingdon North had very popular councillors around the time of the 1978 election, which may also have encouraged turnout in these elections. Factors such as these may help to explain the reasons for Ickenham's higher than expected level of turnout. As for the behaviour of other wards in Table 6.22, similar explanatory factors could be found by using qualitative research techniques, but it is probable that these wards have extreme values for the determinants of turnout variation found in earlier sections of this chapter. Richmond-upon-Thames for example, has a history of having a high level of turnout, and the fact that it contains a number of middle-class wards with high rates of political competition, combines to produce the high turnout. The reverse of this situation can be said for a borough like Southwark.

The election of 1990 provided the most number of residual wards with thirteen, which amounts to nearly a third of the total number of residuals. It has been well documented that 1990 was the so-called 'poll tax election', because it was thought that this issue was not only important for a voter in deciding whether they would vote, but also who they would actually vote for. In this election, nine out of the thirteen residual wards had turnouts higher than expected, and five of these came from two boroughs well-known for their low rate of poll tax. The three wards in Wandsworth: Fairfield, Latchmere and Roehampton had turnouts of 65%, 53% and 57% respectively in 1990, while their average turnout rates between 1978

and 1994, (excluding the 1990 election) were comparably lower at 54%, 43% and 51%. The other two wards in a low area of taxation were Churchill and Maida Vale from the borough of Westminster. The Churchill ward also appears in the list of outliers in 1994, thereby keeping its high rate of participation from 1990 (61% in 1994). Westminster is not known as a borough that produces wards with high levels of turnout, in fact two wards from this borough, Baker Street with a turnout of 26% in 1986 and Knightsbridge with a turnout of 30% in 1994 appeared in Table 6.4 illustrating the wards that featured in the bottom ten turnout wards in an election. In addition to this, the Cavendish ward appeared as a negative residual in 1978 (Table 6.22). Hence, this evidence provides even more support for our argument that the higher than expected levels of voter participation in some boroughs in 1990 was the result of the electorate's approval of their lower than average local tax rate.

The final observation from Table 6.22 concerns the inclusion of Millwall in the list of residual wards in 1994. The residual analysis has shown that the independent variables in our regression can not explain the unexpected high level of turnout in this ward. This is because as we mentioned in Chapter 1, the political circumstances of this ward election where all the major parties were competing like it was a general election to defeat the BNP councillor is expected to have produced the high level of turnout. This example signifies that when the regression analysis can not explain the variation in the level of turnout, an analysis of the residuals can help in providing some information on the behaviour of the electorate in wards.

In order to examine the residuals in more detail and to discover if there is a pattern, we decided to relax the definition of what we would class as a residual ward. A ward was now defined as being a residual if it had standardised residuals which were greater than +/- two. After the limits of inclusion as a residual were widened, we examined whether the outlier wards came from certain boroughs, which wards were the furthest away from their predicted level of turnout in every election and if there were any instances of wards appearing as residuals in more than one election.

The results of the new residual analysis found 157 outlier wards. The wards were quite evenly spread between the elections with the lowest number of 27 residual wards in 1994, while the election of 1986 produced the most number of outliers with 33. Eight boroughs in the data-set did not produce any residual wards, which meant that the outliers were dispersed amongst a few boroughs. Wandsworth had nineteen residual wards, which amounted to 12% of the total, Hammersmith and Fulham produced 10%, while Kingston-upon-Thames and Newham each produced 8% of the total. There were also six boroughs, Barking and Dagenham, Hillingdon, Kensington and Chelsea, Richmond-upon-Thames, Southwark and Westminster that each had 5% or more of the residual wards. These results support the residual analysis carried out at the borough level in London (Table 5.32), which showed that nine out of the ten boroughs mentioned above appeared as residuals. This suggests that residual wards are likely to come from residual boroughs.

We expected that if a borough had more than one residual ward, then these wards would be of the same residual type, i.e. positive or negative residual. This was the case for most of the boroughs, for example, all nineteen residual wards in Wandsworth had a level of turnout higher than expected. There were, however, instances of boroughs that had both positive and negative residual wards within them. Of course, it is possible for a ward to have a one-off 'deviant' level of turnout, but our analysis shows that there are many boroughs which had a number of wards at both ends of the range of turnout figures. A couple of examples will help to illustrate this point. Over the five elections, Barking and Dagenham had three wards with turnouts higher than predicted and six wards with turnouts lower than predicted. Another borough, Kingston-upon-Thames had four wards with a level of turnout higher than their expected level of turnout, as well as eight wards with a level of turnout lower than predicted. This shows that not only is there a great amount of variation in turnout across wards in different London boroughs, there is often variation in turnout beyond what is expected between wards within a single borough.

The next area for examination was to highlight the ward that produced a level of turnout furthest away from its expected level in each election. Our purpose was to identify any wards which appeared more than once and to suggest reasons for such behaviour. We began by examining the wards that were furthest above their predicted level of turnout in each election. Table 6.23 shows that there are no instances of a ward appearing more than once, but as there are only five elections in the data-set, this result is not very surprising. The ward that produced a turnout the furthest above its expected turnout rate was Millwall and the reason(s) for this result have already been suggested. The only ward in Table 6.23 that has not been mentioned so far in this chapter is the Sulivan ward from the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

Table 6.23: The residual London wards with a rate of turnout furthest above the predicted level in every election.

Year	Ward	Borough	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1978	Ickenham	Hillingdon	69	50.9	18.0
1982	Sulivan	Hammersmith and Fulham	63	48.8	13.8
1986	Roehampton	Wandsworth	54	37.7	16.3
1990	Churchill	Westminster	69	49.2	19.3
1994	Millwall	Tower Hamlets	67	42.2	24.3

What explanation can be put forward to account for the high turnout in the Sulivan ward in 1982? Politically, the ward is described as unstable because there are often major swings between the parties at election time. In 1978, the Conservatives won the ward from Labour and had a majority of 12.6%. In 1982, Labour performed very poorly in the ward receiving only 22.7% of the vote, down from the high of 67% in 1964. A swing of 15% occurred from the Conservatives to the Alliance in 1982 and they came within 6% of the Conservatives. It seems that the ward is one where although it has been controlled by the Conservatives throughout the time of this data-set (1978 to 1994), Labour still retains hope of winning the ward. The socio-economic composition of the ward where there are several housing estates (Sulivan Court, Carnworth, John Dwight Houses and the Townmead estate)

as well as a number of half a million pound houses makes for an interesting mix and may help to explain the close political competition in the ward. Finally, the council report that the current Conservative Group leader won the 1982 election in Sulivan and he has built up a small personal vote. This information that has been collected from the London borough is vital in helping to explain the higher than expected turnout in the ward.

The wards with turnout rates that were furthest below those predicted by the regression equation can be seen in Table 6.24. As was the case in Table 6.23, no ward appeared more than once. The Heathfield ward from Croydon in 1990 was the ward that had a turnout furthest below its predicted level. What reasons can be given for the appearance of a ward in Table 6.24? Using the River ward from Barking and Dagenham as an example, this ward produced a consistent turnout between 30-34% between 1978 and 1994. This means that the turnout of 31% in 1986 which made the ward a residual was not a one-off low level of turnout. The examination of turnout by polling stations in the ward shows that one polling station produced a particularly low level of turnout. We asked the local electoral registration office for help in explaining the low turnout in this ward and in that particular polling station. They reported that the ward is mainly composed of a housing estate built in the 1920s. All the houses have two bedrooms which results in them being very popular with young married couples who are buying their first home. Our respondent suggested that this group of people are most likely to be apathetic at both local and general elections. No explanation could be given for the especially low level of turnout in the polling station, although the electoral registration officer had noticed the low returns from this polling station.

Table 6.24: The residual London wards with a rate of turnout furthest below the predicted level in every election.

Year	Ward	Borough	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1978	Church	Kensington and Chelsea	32	48.4	-16.1
1982	Hill	Kingston-upon-Thames	47	60.7	-13.5
1986	River	Barking and Dagenham	31	44.8	-13.4
1990	Heathfield	Croydon	29	48.9	-20.2
1994	Alleyn	Southwark	32	45.9	-13.7

We now know that there are no wards that are the furthest away from their predicted level of turnout in more than one election, but are there any wards that appear amongst the residuals on more than one occasion? The analysis of the 157 residual wards showed that there were 30 wards that appeared as residuals more than once. Table 6.25 includes these 30 wards and shows that nine wards appeared as residuals on three occasions.

None out of the four high/low turnout wards used as examples in Tables 6.3 and 6.5 were residuals on more than one occasion. Liddle (1994), Ordnance (1986) and Hillingdon North (1978) all appeared as a residual in one election, while Richmond Town did not appear as a residual. This shows that just because a ward has an especially high or low level of turnout, does not necessarily mean that it will be a residual. This high/low level of turnout in these wards may have been expected using the knowledge of the political, structural and socio-economic composition of the ward in question.

Table 6.25: The London wards that make more than one appearance as a residual between 1978 and 1994 (five elections).

Ward (Borough)	Number of appearances	Positive residual year	Negative residual year
Oldchurch (Havering)	3		1986, 1990, 1994
St. James' (Kingston-upon-Thames)	3	1986	1978, 1982
New Town (Newham)	3		1978, 1982, 1994
Barnes (Richmond-upon-Thames)	3	1978, 1982, 1990	
Ham and Petersham (Richmond-upon-Thames)	3	1978, 1986, 1990	
Fairfield (Wandsworth)	3	1978, 1990, 1994	
Parkside (Wandsworth)	3	1982, 1986, 1990	
Roehampton (Wandsworth)	3	1982, 1986, 1990	
Southfield (Wandsworth)	3	1982, 1986, 1994	
Chadwell Heath (Barking and Dagenham)	2	1986	1994
Eastbrook (Barking and Dagenham)	2		1982, 1986
River (Barking and Dagenham)	2		1986, 1990
Thames (Barking and Dagenham)	2	1982, 1994	
Martins Hill and Town (Bromley)	2		1986, 1990
Northcote (Ealing)	2	1982, 1990	
Moorsfield (Hackney)	2		1986, 1990
Gibbs Green (Hammersmith and Fulham)	2	1978, 1990	
Sulivan (Hammersmith and Fulham)	2	1978, 1982	
Palace (Hammersmith and Fulham)	2	1986, 1990	
Ickenham (Hillingdon)	2	1978, 1982	
Courtfield (Kensington and Chelsea)	2		1986, 1994
Redcliffe (Kensington and Chelsea)	2		1986, 1994
Royal Hospital (Kensington and Chelsea)	2		1990, 1994
Brompton (Kensington and Chelsea)	2		1990, 1994
Surbiton Hill (Kingston-upon-Thames)	2		1978, 1986
Stratford (Newham)	2		1982, 1986
Abbey (Southwark)	2		1990, 1994
Baker Street (Westminster)	2		1978, 1986
Cavendish (Westminster)	2		1978, 1982
Churchill (Westminster)	2	1990, 1994	

The final part of the residual analysis was to focus concentrate upon two wards in Table 6.25 and attempt to explain what is so special about them that they behave in such a way. Our analysis has shown that a borough can contain both positive and negative residual wards. We would not expect to find a ward that appeared as both a positive and negative turnout residual, but there were two wards in our analysis that performed in such a way. The Chadwell Heath ward (Barking and Dagenham) appeared as a positive residual in 1986 and a negative residual in 1994, and the St. James' ward from Kingston-upon-Thames

appeared as a negative residual in the elections of 1978 and 1982, but as a positive residual in 1986. What reasons can be suggested for this situation in the St. James' ward?

The actual and predicted turnout in the St. James' ward is displayed in Table 6.26. The only way to uncover any information to explain this behaviour was to ask local politicians, agents, party workers and administrators at the local council for their opinions. Unfortunately, the electoral registration office in Kingston-upon-Thames were unable to provide any substantial reasons for the turnout rate to vary in such a way over time. The ward was described as being like any other ward in the borough, in the way that it is a typical middle-class suburb in the commuter belt. It is composed of couples with 2.2 children who live in semi-detached houses with neatly mown lawns and roses around the doors. The figures from the 1981 and 1991 censuses show that over 80% of households in the ward are owner occupiers. The political history of the ward may help in our explanation of the high turnout. In 1978, the Conservatives had a majority of 34% over the second placed candidate, and in 1982, this lead was stretched to 51%. The council representative and the political parties suggested that from the 1986 election onwards, the parties campaigned very hard in the area. The electorate were bombarded with literature from the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives especially. The figures in our data-base only indicate how many parties competed in the election and the actual result. This is why local information such as the intensity of campaigning is vital in trying to explain why turnout varies so much between wards and local authorities.

Table 6.26: Actual and predicted levels of turnout in the St. James' ward (Kingston-upon-Thames).

Year	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1978	47	60.6	-13.8
1982	44	56.5	-12.4
1986	59	48.6	10.2
1990	**57**	**55.0**	**2.0**
1994	**52**	**51.1**	**0.4**
Mean	51.8	54.4	-2.7

(The figures in bold are not residuals using the limits of being +/- 2 standard deviations away).

The other residual ward from Table 6.25 we focused upon was the Parkside ward from the borough of Wandsworth. We have previously mentioned other residual wards in this borough and explained their appearances because of the borough's low rate of poll tax in 1990. Table 6.27 illustrates that this ward has always produced a level of turnout higher than expected in every election and not just in 1990. What reasons, if any, can be given for the continued high level of turnout in this ward?

The turnout in the borough of Wandsworth has been gradually increasing over time, reaching its peak in 1990. A representative of the council says that although they do not have any formal structure of methods to improve the democratic workings of the borough, the administration try in many informal ways to listen to the people and do what they want. The Parkside ward is described by the Returning Officer as an unusual ward. It is located in the leafy part of the borough, near Wimbledon Tennis Club on the common. The socio-economic composition of the ward using figures from the 1981 census, indicate that the ward had 64% of households which were council tenants compared to 24% of households which owned their own homes. The 1991 census figures show that there has been a great deal of change to the housing structure in the ward. A large percentage of council tenants have bought the lease for their council property, which has resulted in only 30% of households being classed as council tenants, compared to 57% of households which now own their own home. The ward has become an area where council tenants that have good

records of behaviour, i.e. paying their rent on time, wish to have a transfer to move there. The Returning Officer describes the electorate as being composed of the C1/C2's - those who aspire to move up the class ladder and that group that was so successfully captured by the Thatcher government in the 1980s.

Table 6.27: Actual and predicted levels of turnout in the Parkside ward (Wandsworth).

Year	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1978	**55**	**46.2**	**8.6**
1982	57	46.2	11.0
1986	60	49.0	11.4
1990	63	52.3	11.0
1994	**56**	**48.0**	**8.2**
Mean	58.2	48.3	10.0

(The figures in bold are not residuals using the limits of being +/- 2 standard deviations away).

The political background of the borough also gives us some pointers as to why the level of turnout has been consistently high in the ward. In 1974, the council was controlled by the Labour party which had 58 seats compared to the Conservatives twelve seats. The political situation four years later was very different, with the Conservatives winning control of the borough with 36 seats to Labour's 25. Our respondent from the borough speculated that the high turnout in 1978, and in elections after this date was the result of a revolt amongst council tenants. The policy of the Conservative's campaign in the borough elections of 1978 was to be critical of the high rates that people had to pay under Labour, and the general poor treatment the electorate received from the council. The Conservatives said that things would be better under the their control and the results of the election proved that their campaigning was a success. Wards in Wandsworth such as Parkside have been nurtured ever since as a Conservative stronghold, by carrying out a great deal of canvassing and setting up community associations.

Similar reasons can be suggested to explain the high turnout rates in the other three wards from Wandsworth that make three appearances as residual wards in Table 6.25. Fairfield, for example, is a ward that is vulnerable to political change. A large amount of canvassing takes place in this ward by all major parties which is believed to have an effect on the proportion of people voting. Without narrowing our focus down to a particular ward, we will not be able to discover how the turnout rates can vary quite considerably in magnitude within an electoral unit. A proportion of the residual wards have a history of being habitual outliers, the reason for this situation can not easily be explained without any local knowledge of the ward in question. There are more cases of wards being residual on only one occasion. Unless there has been an issue in the borough that has gained attention nationally, we are unlikely to be in a position to explain the turnout without concentrating upon the individual ward.

The analysis of residuals implies that there are other variables that could be discovered and entered into the regression equation to improve the explanation of the variation in turnout. We have shown that the independent variables can successfully explain over 60% of the variation in the dependent variable, but there remains nearly 40% left unexplained. Of course, we will never be able to provide all the reasons for turnout to vary in every ward contest and in every election, but we should recognise that without using qualitative research techniques in addition to our quantitative data analysis, our explanation of the variation in turnout will be incomplete. Qualitative research methods help us to answer a number of important questions such as the following: 'Was there an important local issue which provoked interest in the election, thereby raising the level of turnout?' 'Did a major political party put up a 'paper candidate' and conduct no canvassing?' 'Do some of the wards have a history of consistently 'deviant' rates of turnout for some specific local cultural reason?' Questions of this nature can best be answered by 'going to ground'. Electoral registration officers can be interviewed, and local agents or party workers in the area in question can be asked in-depth questions which can assist with the research.

6.17: Conclusions.

This chapter has shown that there is a great deal of variation in the level of turnout which not only exists across wards but also between wards within a single borough. We have managed to explain some of this variation by using a range of political, structural and socio-economic variables. Our early bivariate analysis of the political and structural variables, for example, found that whether the ward is single- or multi- member, the number of major parties contesting an election, the party share of the vote and previous marginality, all seem to have a relationship with the level of turnout. The use of the variables from the census enabled us to suggest that variables measuring the housing and occupational structure of the electorate also appeared important.

The results of the multivariate analysis showed that when all the independent variables are considered together, the socio-economic variables seem to be the most important variables, but both political (previous marginality) and structural (the number of vacancies in a ward and the size of the electorate) variables also have an independent effect on explaining the variation in turnout. The regression equation at its best managed to explain more than six tenths of the variation in turnout, which should be regarded as a good result. The analysis of residuals showed us that some London boroughs produced a large proportion of cases, and also some wards appeared as residuals a number of times. These wards are statistically the most 'deviant' cases, so qualitative research methods were used to explain the reasons for the level of turnout in these places. The results of this investigation suggest that local knowledge can help to explain why turnout is especially high or low in some wards, but it is not feasible to extend this analysis for all residual wards.

Chapter 7: Explaining turnout variation in metropolitan wards.

7.1: Introduction.

This chapter follows a similar path to the previous chapter, but analyses the metropolitan wards that have remained the same over time. There are a total of 827 wards in the metropolitan boroughs, but there have been a number of changes that have occurred to these wards over time, such as boundary changes, which exclude some wards from the analysis. Following these exclusions, the data-set comprises some 510 wards in each election. The eleven elections span between 1980 and 1994, bringing the total number of cases to analyse to 5,610. The size of the ward electorates differ quite widely from Everton (Liverpool) which had 4,535 registered electors in 1994 to Mosborough (Sheffield) which had an electorate of 25,127 for the election in the same year. Other structural variables, along with political and socio-economic variables will be examined to see if they influence the level of turnout. This chapter will begin, however, with a preliminary investigation of ward turnout across the metropolitan boroughs.

7.2: Historical background to turnout rates in metropolitan wards.

Table 7.1 shows that the average rate of turnout in the metropolitan wards has remained at approximately the same level over time. The election of 1992 produced the lowest turnout of 32.9%, while 46.7% of the electorate voted in 1990. This provides a range of nearly fourteen percentage points between the lowest and highest average election turnout figures. Over the eleven elections, the average turnout is 40.2%.

At the ward level in London (section 6.3), the turnout figures at the extreme ends of the turnout spectrum remained within a relatively small band. The minimum figures varied by only six percentage points, while the maximum turnout in wards deviated by just four percentage points. At the metropolitan ward level, the range in the rates of voter

participation is much wider. In 1992, there were six wards that had only 17% of their registered electorate turning out to vote. In another election (1990), the lowest ward turnout figure was relatively high at 32% - a range of fifteen percentage points. Meanwhile, the largest rates of voter participation in an election varied between 53% in 1992 to 64% in the Central and Falinge ward (Rochdale) in 1987. This gave a range between these figures of eleven percentage points. Two possible reasons can be given to explain the wider variation in turnout encountered in the metropolitan wards compared with London. The first is that there are more elections in the metropolitan data-set and more chance for turnout variation. Secondly, as the elections to the metropolitan boroughs are held more frequently than in London, it is likely that the turnout in metropolitan wards will be affected by the volatile national political scene and so will vary widely from one election to another.

We can make two further observations about Table 7.1. Firstly, there is quite a wide variation between the minimum and maximum figures, therefore, the range between the lowest turnout in a ward election and the highest ward turnout will be extremely wide. This figure is 48 percentage points (16%-64%) and shows that the metropolitan average turnout figure of 40% does not tell the whole story of the variation in the level of turnout that exists. Secondly, there are instances of boroughs producing a number of different wards that have the highest/lowest turnout in more than one election. Stockport, for example, produced two different wards with the highest turnout in an election (Cheadle Hume South in 1982 and 1983 and South Marple in 1992) and Liverpool has two different wards that are equally the lowest turnout wards (Everton in 1980 and Abercromby in 1994). Table 7.1 also shows that the same ward can appear more than once at the extreme end of the range of turnouts in these elections. Princes End, for example, has the lowest turnout in eight out of the eleven elections. The next two sections will examine which wards appear at the top or bottom end of the turnout league in every election. This will enable us to determine whether they are either the same wards, or different wards from the same borough, or completely different wards that appear each time. We will then move on to investigate the turnout at the ward

level within boroughs, and examine whether it remains at roughly the same level within a borough, or if there is some evidence of variation in turnout rates.

Table 7.1: The averages and range in the level of turnout in metropolitan wards by year of election (1980-1994).

Year	Mean	Min	Ward	Borough	Max	Ward	Borough
1980	38.7	18	Everton	Liverpool	55	Saddleworth East	Oldham
		18	Hindley Green	Wigan			
1982	38.0	21	Hateley Heath	Sandwell	56	Cheadle Hulme South	Stockport
		21	Princes End	Sandwell			
1983	42.1	24	Princes End	Sandwell	59	Cheadle Hulme South	Stockport
1984	39.9	16	Princes End	Sandwell	63	Grassendale	Liverpool
1986	39.5	20	Princes End	Sandwell	58	Grassendale	Liverpool
1987	44.1	22	Princes End	Sandwell	64	Central and Falinge	Rochdale
1988	39.0	22	Princes End	Sandwell	58	Flixton	Trafford
1990	46.7	32	Coldhurst	Oldham	61	Basildon	Bradford
		32	Princes End	Sandwell	61	Bingley	Bradford
					61	Shipley West	Bradford
1991	41.5	25	Hindley Green	Wigan	57	Holyrood	Bury
					57	Saddleworth East	Oldham
1992	32.9	17	Ardsley	Barnsley	53	South Marple	Stockport
		17	Monk Bretton	Barnsley			
		17	Park	Sheffield			
		17	Blackbrook	St. Helens			
		17	Newtown	Wigan			
		17	Worsley Marshes	Wigan			
1994	39.3	24	Abercromby	Liverpool	55	Prenton	Wirral
		24	Princes End	Sandwell			
		24	Abram	Wigan			

7.3: High turnout wards in the metropolitan boroughs.

In London, we examined the ten wards with the highest turnout rates in each election. In the metropolitan boroughs, it was decided to examine those wards with the five highest rates of turnouts (we included all wards that were equal fifth in the turnout table) in every election. This change will produce a similar number of wards to the analysis in London and we will continue to be able to detect patterns of behaviour. Answers will be sought to questions such as: Are there any wards that consistently produce the highest rates of turnout, if so,

which boroughs do the wards come from? Which parties receive the highest share of the vote in the high turnout wards and how close are the previous contests to these wards?

A total of 74 wards appear in Table 7.2. As was the case in London, a few boroughs provide the majority of the high turnout wards. 20 wards in Table 7.2 came from the borough of Stockport (27% of the total), Bury has eight occurrences in the table (11%) and three boroughs, Liverpool, Trafford and Wirral, each provide seven wards (9%) that appeared in the top five in an election. A ward has the opportunity to appear in the top five turnout rates in eleven elections. The wards that appeared the most number of times were Flixton (Trafford) and South Marple (Stockport) with seven appearances apiece. Next in the list of number of appearances is Ramsbottom (Bury) that had a turnout that placed it in the top five turnout rates in five elections and Saddleworth East (Oldham) and Cheadle Hume South (Stockport) with four appearances each.

Some wards in Table 7.2 only appear on one occasion. One such ward is Central and Falinge from the borough of Rochdale which is placed at the top of the turnout table. What is so special about this ward that nearly two thirds of the electorate voted in 1987? To answer this question, we need some historical background to the party competition in the ward. The examination of the elections held between 1980 and 1994 shows that Labour have won the ward on seven occasions and the Liberals/Liberal Democrats have won it three times. From 1982 to 1986 the ward was regarded as a Liberal stronghold, but since then it has been won by Labour except in 1991, when the Liberal Democrats regained the ward. Clearly, the ward is likely to be one where Labour and the Liberal Democrats compete very hard. Not only are the major parties contesting the ward, but there have been a number of other parties that have contested the ward. In 1980, one candidate stood for the Communist party and another stood for the National Front. In 1990, a candidate stood for the Pakistan Independent Association, in 1991, an Independent candidate stood for election and in 1995 a 'Socialist' unsuccessfully sought election in the ward. Going back even further in time, the council records show that a candidate stood in 1973 for the British Campaign to Stop

Immigration and received 536 votes. This political history of Central and Falinge shows that the ward generates a number of candidates contesting the election with the race issue being the defining characteristic. According to the 1991 census there is a high Asian minority in the ward (NCWP = 31.93%). Although the council can not suggest any reasons for the high turnout of 64% in 1987, the evidence outlined above seems to suggest that the nature of the political contest in the ward was the important factor.

The next area of interest from Table 7.2 are the parties which receive the highest share of the vote in the high turnout wards. 41 out of the total of 74 wards saw the Liberal Democrats in first place, with the Conservatives winning 21 wards and Labour with just 12. As in London, these results suggest that there seems to be a relationship between Liberal Democrat success in a ward and a high level of turnout. Similarly, wards where the Labour party receive the highest vote share, turnout is unlikely to be high. The final column in Table 7.2 gives the figure for ward marginality at the previous election. This shows that 34 wards had a majority of less than ten percentage points. Eleven of these wards have a previous marginality figure of less than two percentage points. This indicates that a close contest the last time the election was fought may have a bearing upon the high level of turnout at the following election. Overall, the average marginality figure for wards in Table 7.2 was 12.9%.

Table 7.2: List of metropolitan wards that appeared in the top five ward turnout rates in each election between 1980 and 1994.

Ward (Borough)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Central and Falinge (Rochdale)	1987	64	Labour	10.45
Grassendale (Liverpool)	1984	63	Lib Dems	16.12
Flixton (Trafford)	1987	63	Conservative	1.07
Grassendale (Liverpool)	1987	61	Lib Dems	52.01
Basildon (Bradford)	1990	61	Conservative	3.33
Bingley (Bradford)	1990	61	Conservative	20.57
Shipley West (Bradford)	1990	61	Labour	15.28
Ramsbottom (Bury)	1987	60	Conservative	8.60
South Marple (Stockport)	1987	60	Lib Dems	8.08

Table 7.2: cont:

Ward (Borough)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Ramsbottom (Bury)	1990	60	Labour	6.64
Flixton (Trafford)	1990	60	Conservative	16.57
Cheadle Hume South (Stockport)	1983	59	Lib Dems	12.42
Bradbury (Stockport)	1983	58	Lib Dems	25.93
Church (Liverpool)	1984	58	Lib Dems	17.86
Grassendale (Liverpool)	1986	58	Lib Dems	22.24
Flixton (Trafford)	1988	58	Conservative	14.32
Saddleworth East (Oldham)	1983	57	Lib Dems	2.48
North Marple (Stockport)	1983	57	Lib Dems	6.90
Bessacarr (Doncaster)	1984	57	Conservative	21.85
County (Liverpool)	1984	57	Lib Dems	2.97
Cheadle Hume South (Stockport)	1984	57	Lib Dems	0.15
Ramsbottom (Bury)	1986	57	Labour	3.65
Todmorden (Calderdale)	1986	57	Labour	11.15
Holyrood (Bury)	1991	57	Lib Dems	0.89
Saddleworth East (Oldham)	1991	57	Lib Dems	10.89
Cheadle Hume South (Stockport)	1982	56	Lib Dems	8.02
East Bramhall (Stockport)	1983	56	Conservative	19.28
Hazel Grove (Stockport)	1983	56	Lib Dems	0.90
South Marple (Stockport)	1983	56	Lib Dems	11.07
Flixton (Trafford)	1983	56	Lib Dems	6.50
Edgeley (Stockport)	1986	56	Lib Dems	0.46
Ramsbottom (Bury)	1988	56	Labour	11.41
Todmorden (Calderdale)	1988	56	Labour	0.84
Prenton (Wirral)	1991	56	Conservative	4.48
Saddleworth East (Oldham)	1980	55	Conservative	29.23
North Marple (Stockport)	1982	55	Conservative	16.30
Smithills (Bolton)	1991	55	Lib Dems	15.20
Todmorden (Calderdale)	1991	55	Labour	35.51
Brimrod and Deeplish (Rochdale)	1991	55	Lib Dems	15.99
Healey (Rochdale)	1991	55	Lib Dems	0.45
Packwood (Solihull)	1991	55	Lib Dems	4.98
Manor (Stockport)	1991	55	Lib Dems	3.97
Great Moor (Stockport)	1991	55	Lib Dems	21.66
South Marple (Stockport)	1991	55	Lib Dems	10.20
Flixton (Trafford)	1991	55	Conservative	7.75
Eastham (Wirral)	1991	55	Lib Dems	8.96
Prenton (Wirral)	1994	55	Lib Dems	0.72
Wallasey (Wirral)	1991	55	Conservative	21.47
Stockbridge (Sheffield)	1980	54	Lib Dems	18.62
Childwall (Liverpool)	1986	54	Lib Dems	1.69
Church (Liverpool)	1986	54	Lib Dems	19.13
Aston Orgreave and Ulley (Rotherham)	1986	54	Labour	25.38
Moreton (Wirral)	1986	54	Labour	0.22
Prenton (Wirral)	1986	54	Lib Dems	10.59
Moorside (Bury)	1988	54	Labour	3.25
South Marple (Stockport)	1988	54	Conservative	9.32
Moreton (Wirral)	1988	54	Labour	1.88
Horwich (Bolton)	1994	54	Lib Dems	23.85
Broom (Rotherham)	1994	54	Conservative	18.94
Flixton (Trafford)	1994	54	Conservative	27.65

Table 7.2: cont:

Ward (Borough)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Basildon (Bradford)	1980	53	Lib Dems	8.25
Tottington (Bury)	1980	53	Conservative	39.49
Cheadle Hume South (Stockport)	1980	53	Conservative	36.66
South Marple (Stockport)	1982	53	Conservative	26.05
Flixton (Trafford)	1982	53	Conservative	4.12
South Marple (Stockport)	1992	53	Lib Dems	12.46
South Marple (Stockport)	1994	53	Lib Dems	2.09
West Bramhall (Stockport)	1994	53	Lib Dems	12.39
Healey (Rochdale)	1982	52	Lib Dems	2.16
Ramsbottom (Bury)	1992	52	Conservative	4.59
Saddleworth East (Oldham)	1992	51	Lib Dems	11.11
Spotland (Rochdale)	1992	51	Lib Dems	50.91
Horwich (Bolton)	1992	50	Lib Dems	3.11
Healey (Rochdale)	1992	50	Lib Dems	12.72

We selected two wards, Flixton (Trafford) and South Marple (Stockport), from Table 7.2 that appeared a number of times and investigated whether the political competition and/or the socio-economic composition of the wards could explain their continued high levels of turnout. The election of 1987 was chosen as an example for both wards. The contest at the previous election to Flixton was very close with just over one percentage point separating the leading two parties. The ratio of the vote was a 35:34:31 split between Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats respectively. The level of party competition and canvassing in a three-way 'marginal' may have influenced the level of turnout. The election results in South Marple also seem to indicate the importance of party competition. The contests in this ward are generally quite close - there was a gap of just over eight percentage points at the previous election to 1987. The ward was captured from the Conservatives by the Liberal Democrats in 1986 and that party has held it since. Perhaps, the tightly fought nature of the political contests in this ward may have some bearing upon the high turnout.

Examining the socio-economic composition of these wards may also contribute to our explanation of the high level of turnout. As Table 7.3 shows, more than eight in ten households were owner occupiers while less than one household in ten lived in a council

house. There was a high percentage of people belonging to the professional/managerial class in South Marple, while overall the low percentage of households having no access to a car and the level of unemployment at approximately half the average rate for the metropolitan boroughs, indicates that these wards are relatively prosperous. The level of turnout is thought to be reflected by these outlined factors. Whether we would have expected the level of turnout to be at this sort of level with the knowledge of its political and socio-economic make-up will be determined by the analysis of residuals in section 7.14.

Table 7.3: The socio-economic make-up of two high turnout wards in the metropolitan boroughs compared to the average census figures for the data-set and the average census figures for the high turnout wards*.

Variable	Census 1991	Mean census figures for the high turnout wards	Flixton 1987	South Marple 1987
COUNCIL	24.4	12.7	9.9	7.5
MANUAL	36.0	29.6	30.8	20.5
MANUF	21.7	19.5	16.9	17.1
NCWP	5.4	3.1	1.3	0.7
NOCAR	39.9	29.4	27.0	19.0
OWNOCC	65.7	79.9	84.4	87.4
PROFMAN	16.0	22.4	17.7	35.2
SELFEMP	10.1	11.4	6.3	15.3
SKILLED	22.8	20.3	25.3	16.0
UNEMP	6.9	4.6	3.5	2.9

*(Only 51 out of the 74 high turnout wards are included in the mean census figures for the high turnout wards, as these are the wards that had their high rates of turnout in elections after 1985. Hence, we are comparing the values for the socio-economic variables from the 1991 census only).

7.4: Low turnout wards in the metropolitan boroughs.

The findings of the analysis of the low turnout wards was similar to the results in section 7.3, in so far as the wards came from a small number of boroughs. There are a total of 75 wards in Table 7.4. The metropolitan borough of Sandwell provides 28 of these wards, which amounts to 37% of the total. Wigan has sixteen (21%) wards out of the total and

Sheffield has seven (9%) of the wards at the bottom end of the turnout scale. This means that just three boroughs produced 67% of the total of low turnout wards.

Not only can a borough produce wards that appear at the bottom end of the turnout table in a number of elections, but these wards can often be the same wards reappearing. For example, ten of the 28 appearances from Sandwell is the same ward (Princes End) repeatedly having a low rate of turnout. Another ward from Sandwell, Hateley Heath, appears in the bottom five turnout rates in six out of the eleven elections. Finally, Hindley Green from Wigan also makes six appearances in Table 7.4.

Apart from the majority of wards in Table 7.4 coming from a small group of boroughs, is there anything else significant about the low turnout wards? It can be no coincidence that 72 out of the 75 wards were Labour wards. Only Chadderton North from Oldham in 1982 and Princes End from Sandwell (1991) had the Conservatives receiving the highest share of the vote. A solitary ward, Coldhurst from Oldham, had the Liberal Democrats in first place in 1990. These results seem to confirm our findings in London where 52 of the 58 low turnout wards were won by Labour. A final characteristic that these low turnout wards have in common are their safeness. The marginality figures indicate that only one ward, Princes End from Sandwell in 1980, had a marginality of less than ten percentage points in its previous ward election. Overall, the average previous marginality for the 73 low turnout wards (two wards were not contested in the previous election) was 43.29%. This is a result very similar to the average figure found in London (43.8%) and is more than 30 percentage points higher than the figure produced for the high turnout wards. This would seem to indicate that for the high and low turnout wards at least, the previous marginality figure in a ward seems to have an inverse relationship with the level of turnout.

Table 7.4: List of metropolitan wards that appeared in the bottom five ward turnout rates in each election between 1980 and 1994.

Ward (Borough)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Princes End (Sandwell)	1984	16	Labour	45.80
Ardsley (Barnsley)	1992	17	Labour	
Monk Bretton (Barnsley)	1992	17	Labour	43.07
Park (Sheffield)	1992	17	Labour	60.90
Blackbrook (St. Helens)	1992	17	Labour	52.13
Newtown (Wigan)	1992	17	Labour	51.28
Worsley Mesnes (Wigan)	1992	17	Labour	64.50
Everton (Liverpool)	1980	18	Labour	38.50
Hindley Green (Wigan)	1980	18	Labour	63.53
Hateley Heath (Sandwell)	1980	20	Labour	28.88
Ince (Wigan)	1980	20	Labour	15.53
Princes End (Sandwell)	1986	20	Labour	45.70
Hateley Heath (Sandwell)	1982	21	Labour	36.93
Princes End (Sandwell)	1982	21	Labour	39.98
Orenden (Calderdale)	1986	21	Labour	44.50
Princes End (Sandwell)	1980	22	Labour	2.02
Rowley (Sandwell)	1980	22	Labour	36.25
Everton (Liverpool)	1982	22	Labour	47.76
Hateley Heath (Sandwell)	1984	22	Labour	22.53
Princes End (Sandwell)	1987	22	Labour	39.71
Princes End (Sandwell)	1988	22	Labour	20.99
Hateley Heath (Sandwell)	1986	23	Labour	31.30
Farnworth (Bolton)	1982	24	Labour	50.27
Middleton (Leeds)	1982	24	Labour	60.27
Chadderton North (Oldham)	1982	24	Conservative	10.25
Princes End (Sandwell)	1983	24	Labour	27.62
Friar Park (Sandwell)	1984	24	Labour	24.44
Great Bridge (Sandwell)	1984	24	Labour	30.87
Wednesbury (Sandwell)	1984	24	Labour	12.21
Illingworth (Calderdale)	1986	24	Labour	29.80
Ardsley (Barnsley)	1988	24	Labour	21.03
Great Bridge (Sandwell)	1988	24	Labour	20.54
Hindley Green (Wigan)	1988	24	Labour	44.22
Abercromby (Liverpool)	1994	24	Labour	59.65
Princes End (Sandwell)	1994	24	Labour	25.54
Abram (Wigan)	1994	24	Labour	60.40
Greets Green and Lyng (Sandwell)	1986	25	Labour	48.40
Park (Sheffield)	1986	25	Labour	72.80
Fordbridge (Solihull)	1986	25	Labour	33.22
Kimberworth (Rotherham)	1988	25	Labour	44.04
Rowley (Sandwell)	1988	25	Labour	27.06
Brightside (Sheffield)	1988	25	Labour	53.99
Fordbridge (Solihull)	1988	25	Labour	23.22
Blackbrook (St. Helens)	1988	25	Labour	48.73
Abram (Wigan)	1988	25	Labour	68.75
Worsley Mesnes (Wigan)	1988	25	Labour	56.80
Hindley Green (Wigan)	1991	25	Labour	44.45
University (Leeds)	1994	25	Labour	43.60
Castle (Sheffield)	1994	25	Labour	42.52

Table 7.4: cont:

Ward (Borough)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Hindley (Wigan)	1994	25	Labour	56.11
Hindley Green (Wigan)	1994	25	Labour	30.65
Mexborough (Doncaster)	1983	26	Labour	46.76
Soho and Victoria (Sandwell)	1987	26	Labour	68.49
Granby (Liverpool)	1991	27	Labour	71.11
Princes End (Sandwell)	1991	27	Conservative	31.12
Netherthorpe (Sheffield)	1991	27	Labour	60.07
Park (Sheffield)	1991	27	Labour	80.79
Worsley Mesnes (Wigan)	1991	27	Labour	84.74
Ardsley (Barnsley)	1983	28	Labour	44.05
Armthorpe (Doncaster)	1983	28	Labour	35.34
Hateley Heath (Sandwell)	1983	28	Labour	15.28
Rowley (Sandwell)	1987	28	Labour	45.38
Hindley Green (Wigan)	1987	28	Labour	
Cradley Heath and Old Hill (Sandwell)	1987	29	Labour	36.57
Great Bridge (Sandwell)	1987	29	Labour	39.42
Hateley Heath (Sandwell)	1987	29	Labour	43.99
Fordbridge (Solihull)	1987	29	Labour	62.95
Leigh East (Wigan)	1987	29	Labour	48.19
Coldhurst (Oldham)	1990	32	Lib Dems	57.14
Princes End (Sandwell)	1990	32	Labour	42.93
Hindley Green (Wigan)	1990	33	Labour	61.14
Worsley Mesnes (Wigan)	1990	33	Labour	71.67
Thorne (Doncaster)	1990	34	Labour	14.97
Sharrow (Sheffield)	1990	34	Labour	59.56
Bedford and Astley (Wigan)	1990	34	Labour	34.98

Following the structure of ward level analysis in London, the final part of the investigation of the low turnout wards in the metropolitan boroughs is to choose two wards from Table 7.4 and examine their political and socio-economic composition in more detail. Can anything be extracted from either the census variables or the election outcomes to help explain the low level of voter participation. The two wards that were chosen were Princes End and Hateley Heath, both from the borough of Sandwell. The turnout in Princes End has never risen above 32% and over the fourteen year period averages just 23%. It appeared in the list of low turnout wards a record ten times out of the eleven elections. The level of turnout in Hateley Heath was at its highest in 1990 at 39%, but its average turnout between 1980 and 1994 was a lowly 25% and it appeared in the low turnout table on six occasions.

Princes End is a relatively safe ward for Labour with the party winning nine out of eleven elections. The Conservatives broke the dominance only in 1991 and 1992. Using the election of 1982 as an example, the figure for previous marginality was very high at 39.98%. From a political context, we could argue that such a lead over the second placed candidate may have meant that some of the electorate did not vote because the outcome of the election was in little doubt. Our definition of marginality at the ward level is that a winning majority of more than 35% is regarded as being a 'very safe' ward. Hence, the Princes End ward is 'very safe' in 1982 and the turnout is low at 21%. The political contests in Hateley Heath are also not very close. The Labour Party have won the ward on ten occasions, the Conservatives were placed first in the ward in the aftermath of the 1992 general election. In 1982, the previous marginality figure in Hateley Heath was 36.93%. This indicates another 'very safe' ward for Labour which resulted in only 21% of the electorate turning out to vote. This brief political history of the two wards would seem to indicate that the dominance of one party may help to account for the low turnout at the polls. The next step in our analysis is to examine the socio-economic make-up of the two wards and ask whether we would have expected their turnout rates to have been so poor if we had taken their social composition into account.

Table 7.5 shows the values of a number of census variables for the wards, Princes End and Hateley Heath. By comparing the census figures for the two wards in question with the average census figures for the metropolitan wards, it shows that these two wards are relatively 'deprived' areas. On average, about 70% of the households in Princes End and Hateley Heath are council tenants, compared to the mean figure for the data-set of just under a third. The two wards are also composed of a higher proportion of people who work in the manufacturing industry and are manual or skilled workers than is the average for the metropolitan wards in our data-set. Two variables that signify low levels of income in the two wards are the figures that show that 55% of households in these wards have no access to a car, and also the unemployment rate is considerably higher than the average for the metropolitan wards. These patterns are repeated for the other wards that had low rates of

turnout in elections before 1986. At this early stage of analysis, the figures show that the social composition of wards may help to explain the low turnout in local government wards. We will have to wait until our regression analysis using all the independent variables in section 7.13 to discover whether these wards produce turnout rates that are unexpected when their socio-economic and political situation is taken into account, i.e. whether they are residuals or not.

Table 7.5: The socio-economic make-up of two low turnout wards in the metropolitan boroughs compared to the average census figures for the data-set and the average census figures for the low turnout wards*.

Variable	Census 1981	Mean census figures for the low turnout wards	Princes End 1982	Hateley Heath 1980
COUNCIL	32.5	61.2	72.4	68.8
MANUAL	54.5	68.4	67.6	68.6
MANUF	43.9	54.6	61.6	53.6
NCWP	4.0	2.6	2.1	4.9
NOCAR	46.0	56.2	55.4	55.3
OWNOCC	57.1	33.9	22.4	27.9
PROFMAN	14.0	7.8	10.4	6.3
SELFEMP	7.0	4.4	3.5	3.8
SKILLED	26.7	32.9	36.1	33.1
UNEMP	12.2	18.0	21.0	17.9

*(Only 22 out of the 75 low turnout wards are included in the mean census figures for the low turnout wards, as these are the wards that had their low rates of turnout in elections before 1985. Hence, we are comparing the values for the socio-economic variables from the 1981 census only).

7.5: The 'highs and lows' of ward turnout within the metropolitan boroughs.

Sections 7.3 and 7.4 have shown that there is a very wide variation in the turnout figures at the ward level in the metropolitan boroughs, between the lowest turnout of 17% in 1992 and the highest figure of 64% in 1987. Although there is a large range between the turnout figures, there is some consistency to the boroughs and the wards that produce these especially high or low levels of voter participation. This section tests the hypothesis that wards in a borough will produce a consistent rate of turnout in an election. We know from our analysis of turnout at the metropolitan borough level in Chapter 4 that the average

turnout rates in boroughs varies considerably. How much variation in turnout is there within boroughs at the ward level?

The first way to test this hypotheses is to examine the two tables of high and low turnout wards (Table 7.2 and 7.4). An analysis of the boroughs that produce these wards shows that there are eight, Bolton, Calderdale, Doncaster, Liverpool, Oldham, Rotherham, Sheffield and Solihull, which had at least one ward in the list of top and bottom turnout wards. Liverpool, for instance, had seven cases that have a rate of turnout that put them in the top five in an election (Grassendale in 1984, 1986 and 1987, Church in 1984 and 1986, County in 1984 and Childwall in 1986), but, also had four cases of wards that appeared in the bottom five over the time period (Everton in 1980 and 1982, Granby in 1991 and Abercromby in 1994). A similar pattern occurred in Sheffield where five different wards made seven appearances in the bottom five (Park in 1986, 1991 and 1992, Brightside in 1988, Sharrow in 1990, Netherthorpe in 1991 and Castle in 1994), but on one occasion a ward appeared in the top five. This ward is Stockbridge and it had a turnout of 54% in 1980, which is nearly thirteen percentage points higher than its average over the period of study. Chandler writes that, 'A survey of the former Urban District of Stockbridge, which in 1974 was incorporated into Sheffield Metropolitan District, showed that two-thirds of respondents considered that the existing arrangements for local government were unsatisfactory' (1991:26). Perhaps the high turnout in this ward was an indication of public protest to the change in the electoral organisation and a perceived loss of their identity. The only time that a borough had a ward in the top five and the bottom five in the same election is Calderdale in 1986. Todmorden had a turnout of 57% while Orenden saw a turnout of 21% at the same election. What does not occur in the metropolitan wards, like it did in London for the Millwall ward (Tower Hamlets), is for the same ward to appear in the bottom five in one election, and then in the top five at another election.

Table 7.6 shows the average turnout figures and the highest and lowest ward turnout of the 23 metropolitan boroughs in our data-set. The comparison of the average rates of turnout

within a borough over time shows that the figures do not remain at a constant level. The borough with the smallest range between its lowest and highest average turnout is Oldham. This borough had a turnout of 35.3% in 1992 and 43.6% in 1991. This produces a range of just over eight percentage points between the figures. What is noticeable from Table 7.6 is that the average turnout in boroughs generally rises and falls together, i.e. the high turnout rates across the metropolitan boroughs in 1990 and the low turnout rates in 1992. As a result of national factors, the turnout in boroughs over time is unlikely to remain constant.

Table 7.6: Deviation of turnout at the ward level within the metropolitan boroughs (about here).

What about the extent of turnout variation at the ward level within a borough? The examination of the minimum and maximum figures within boroughs in Table 7.6, shows that there are instances of wide ranges of turnout between wards within a borough. Not only does the 40% average turnout figure for all the metropolitan boroughs hide a significant amount of variation, but the average turnout figures for a single borough conceal important differences in turnout. The earlier example of Calderdale in 1986 where the turnout in one ward was only 21% while that in another produced a turnout of 57% is the best example of an average borough turnout figure of around 40% disguising the ward level variation in turnout. Table 7.7 shows the top ten cases of metropolitan boroughs with the highest ranges between the lowest and highest ward turnout in a single election. We may have assumed that wards within a borough would produce similar rates of turnout, but these figures show clearly that this is not always the case.

Table 7.6: Deviation of turnout at the ward level within the metopolitan boroughs.

	1980			1982			1983			1984			1986			1987		
	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max
Bolton	33	45.3	51	24	36.9	42	33	44.2	50	29	39.7	47	30	41.0	47	36	45.7	55
Bury	39	42.8	53	37	42.3	48	42	46.7	52	36	43.6	50	41	46.7	57	45	51.4	60
Oldham	29	38.6	55	24	37.3	51	31	41.2	57	30	37.9	54	30	38.0	52	34	42.1	56
Rochdale	31	38.6	55	28	41.1	52	33	44.8	53	30	39.8	45	30	40.4	49	37	47.6	64
Stockport	40	45.1	53	37	46.8	56	43	50.8	59	39	47.3	57	37	45.2	56	41	52.0	60
Tameside	33	40.1	46	28	38.6	46	32	41.5	54	31	37.5	55	28	36.3	49	34	41.6	53
Trafford	36	43.6	50	35	44.4	53	37	47.4	56	35	42.5	52	32	43.2	52	39	50.7	63
Wigan	18	31.3	49	26	33.1	44	31	39.1	53	28	34.8	51	28	35.7	48	28	37.1	53
Liverpool	18	33.4	47	22	35.3	48	29	41.2	54	38	49.5	63	32	44.3	58	39	49.5	61
St. Helens	31	38.1	48	25	37.5	48	32	40.0	48	29	38.8	51	30	38.6	52	30	40.5	58
Sefton				30	39.0	50	32	40.9	48	31	39.2	47	33	42.6	51	38	46.2	57
Wirral	28	36.5	45	32	40.4	49	36	42.7	51	35	43.3	50	38	46.5	54	39	48.6	55
Barnsley				25	35.6	46	28	40.1	52	27	39.1	52	26	36.9	48	32	40.3	53
Doncaster	28	38.2	47	27	36.2	47	26	38.6	53	32	41.8	57	29	37.3	49	32	41.7	57
Rotherham				26	32.3	44	30	36.1	44	27	34.5	44	27	34.7	54	31	38.5	51
Sheffield	30	39.4	54	30	39.8	51	32	42.8	55	26	35.8	50	25	36.1	47	31	40.5	53
Coventry													28	34.5	41	32	40.1	48
Sandwell	20	28.5	41	21	32.1	42	24	36.6	48	16	30.9	47	20	31.6	44	22	34.2	47
Solihull													25	35.2	45	29	43.0	51
Walsall													26	38.1	53	34	44.9	58
Bradford	33	43.3	53	28	40.9	48	34	45.5	55	27	40.8	48	29	42.2	53	33	46.6	57
Calderdale	32	42.1	51										21	40.8	57	35	46.0	57
Leeds				24	36.5	49	30	40.9	55	26	38.7	51	28	39.6	51	31	43.6	57

23 metropolitan boroughs are included in Table 7.6 as these are the boroughs that have kept the same boundaries over time.

Table 7.6: cont:

	1988			1990			1991			1992			1994		
	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max
Bolton	32	41.3	53	42	49.8	58	35	44.4	55	21	35.0	55	28	41.3	54
Bury	43	48.0	56	49	54.1	60	42	49.1	57	32	42.5	52	41	45.2	49
Oldham	31	39.5	53	32	43.5	55	35	43.6	57	26	35.3	51	33	40.1	50
Rochdale	32	42.0	51	38	48.3	54	33	44.4	55	27	40.1	51	27	40.6	50
Stockport	39	46.3	54	47	54.1	59	42	49.7	55	31	41.4	53	35	45.9	53
Tameside	30	39.2	50	36	42.7	50	30	37.2	46	23	30.5	46	28	36.7	47
Trafford	27	44.8	58	40	49.4	60	34	46.2	55	27	40.6	49	31	45.0	54
Wigan	24	33.3	47	33	39.5	49	25	34.5	55	17	23.8	34	24	30.3	37
Liverpool	30	42.1	52	39	47.9	57	27	39.6	50	21	30.7	41	24	35.5	45
St. Helens	25	36.8	53	36	44.2	57	30	41.0	54	17	30.7	41	30	39.4	47
Sefton	32	40.1	50	40	48.4	55	32	42.3	51	20	34.3	45	26	40.0	50
Wirral	35	44.5	54	43	52.2	59	34	47.7	56				32	42.8	55
Barnsley	24	34.3	50	36	40.0	48	28	35.7	52	17	24.6	41	28	32.8	40
Doncaster	29	35.5	47	34	40.3	50	29	37.1	49	21	26.9	40	30	34.0	46
Rotherham	25	33.6	47	38	41.2	46	30	33.2	42	19	23.5	39	28	37.4	54
Sheffield	25	33.9	46	34	41.1	58	27	34.9	52	17	27.6	46	25	36.1	50
Coventry	28	35.2	41	37	42.7	50	31	38.4	48	21	30.1	42	26	36.6	48
Sandwell	22	31.9	51	32	41.3	50	27	37.6	48	20	31.1	43	24	37.6	45
Solihull	25	36.0	42	37	49.2	58	28	45.1	55	20	37.6	48	30	43.4	52
Walsall	32	40.7	52	38	47.3	59	30	41.8	54	26	36.5	48	31	40.1	49
Bradford	29	41.3	52	41	52.7	61	31	44.6	53	20	35.8	46	30	43.1	52
Calderdale	29	40.0	56	39	49.0	56	32	45.0	55	27	39.7	49	32	43.1	52
Leeds	28	38.5	51	40	48.0	57	29	40.2	54	18	30.8	43	25	37.7	49

Table 7.7: The top ten cases of the highest range of turnout at the ward level in a metropolitan borough election.

Borough	Year	Mean	Min (%)	Max (%)	Range (%)
Calderdale	1986	40.8	21	57	36
Bolton	1992	35.0	21	55	34
Wigan	1980	31.3	18	49	31
Sandwell	1984	30.9	16	47	31
Trafford	1988	44.8	27	58	31
Wigan	1991	34.5	25	55	30
Liverpool	1980	33.4	18	47	29
Sandwell	1988	31.9	22	51	29
Sheffield	1992	27.6	17	46	29
St. Helens	1987	40.5	30	58	28
St. Helens	1988	36.8	25	53	28
Solihull	1992	37.6	20	48	28

(The three boroughs which had the equal tenth highest range of turnout figures have also been included).

This section has illustrated how much turnout can vary within a metropolitan borough. As a result, it is very difficult to make generalisations about turnout levels from average turnout figures. We can not say with any great confidence that even though we may know that the turnout in borough X is usually very high compared to equivalent local authorities, it does not necessarily mean that all wards within this borough will have a similarly high rate of turnout. This preliminary investigation has shown that although most wards keep their place in the league of turnout rates over time, there are many wards that have especially high or low levels of turnout on one-off occasions. The range between turnouts in wards across boroughs is very wide indeed and requires some further analysis.

It is important, therefore, to test some bivariate relationships between some political/structural variables and turnout. The next sections consider whether the size of a ward could be a factor, whether the number of major parties contesting an election is a potential determinant and whether the party share of the vote makes any difference to turnout rates. Finally, we will gauge how significant a measure of previous marginality is in relation to the rate of voter participation in metropolitan ward elections.

7.6: Testing the relationship between turnout and size of ward electorates in the metropolitan boroughs.

The first bivariate relationship to be investigated is the association between the size of a ward (in terms of the electorate) and the level of turnout. We would expect the turnout to be higher in smaller wards in accordance with the previous research carried out in this area (Fletcher, 1969). We tested the possible relationship by recoding the variable measuring the electorate into a number of categories, and then compared the turnout rates according to these groupings. The results in Table 7.8 show that there is little difference in the level of turnout according to the size of the electorate, as the range in average turnout between the categories containing the smallest and largest sized wards only varies by half a percentage point (40% in the 'Less than 8,000' group to 39.5% in the 'More than 12,500' group). These results are similar to those found at the ward level in the London boroughs. As all wards in the metropolitan boroughs have three members and we have shown that the size of ward electorates does not seem to have an effect on the level of turnout, the elector:councillor ratio will similarly have no impact.

Table 7.8: The level of turnout according to the size of the electorate in metropolitan wards.

	Less than 8,000	8,000 -9,000	9,001 -10,000	10,001 -12,500	More than 12,500
1980	40.6 (66)	40.1 (64)	36.7 (70)	38.1 (106)	38.8 (48)
1982	38.9 (80)	37.2 (74)	37.2 (81)	38.5 (116)	38.0 (86)
1983	41.9 (76)	42.5 (72)	41.1 (84)	43.0 (115)	41.7 (86)
1984	38.9 (71)	39.1 (81)	38.6 (75)	41.8 (116)	40.0 (88)
1986	38.8 (76)	39.2 (95)	38.4 (86)	40.9 (137)	39.5 (98)
1987	42.7 (83)	44.5 (92)	42.8 (96)	45.7 (136)	43.9 (96)
1988	38.1 (84)	40.2 (93)	38.4 (90)	40.0 (140)	37.7 (94)
1990	45.7 (82)	46.2 (88)	46.0 (91)	48.5 (139)	45.8 (85)
1991	41.4 (87)	42.1 (77)	40.3 (95)	43.0 (137)	40.0 (88)
1992	33.0 (97)	32.1 (93)	32.4 (89)	33.5 (123)	30.5 (85)
1994	39.9 (93)	39.6 (85)	38.1 (89)	40.4 (135)	38.1 (83)
Mean	40.0 (895)	40.3 (914)	39.1 (946)	41.2 (1400)	39.5 (937)

7.7: Testing the relationship between turnout and party competition in metropolitan wards.

We found in our analysis of London wards that party competition (as measured by the number of major parties in an election) seemed to be an important variable in determining the level of turnout. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that this relationship would also be found in the metropolitan wards. The variable measuring the number of major political parties in a contest (MAJOR) had a range of between one and three. The results in Table 7.9 show that more than 75% of wards had all three major parties competing for the vote, which clearly illustrates the level of party politicisation in the metropolitan boroughs. The figures in Table 7.9 confirm our expectation of turnout being higher, the more major parties contest an election. On average, turnout is more than eight percentage points higher in three party contests than when only one major party competes. There are only 54 wards where only one major party competes, however, so perhaps the better comparison is with two party contests. Still, the turnout in three party contests is nearly five percentage points higher than in two party contests.

Table 7.9: The level of turnout according to the number of major parties in metropolitan ward elections.

	Major =1	Major =2	Major =3
1980	17.5 (1)	36.9 (156)	40.3 (197)
1982		33.2 (39)	38.6 (397)
1983	36.2 (2)	37.4 (55)	42.8 (376)
1984	42.1 (2)	35.9 (86)	40.9 (343)
1986	35.6 (8)	35.1 (88)	40.6 (396)
1987	40.4 (5)	38.9 (59)	44.8 (439)
1988	34.5 (6)	35.1 (126)	40.4 (369)
1990	37.7 (10)	43.6 (153)	48.4 (322)
1991	31.2 (8)	37.9 (120)	43.0 (356)
1992	22.3 (4)	30.1 (111)	34.0 (366)
1994	32.9 (8)	36.5 (105)	40.3 (372)
Mean	33.0 (54)	36.4 (1098)	41.3 (3933)

Linked to this argument that the extent of party competition influences turnout is that a party's share of the vote can also have an effect. The hypothesis is that when the share of the vote for one of the three main parties is particularly high, then the level of turnout will be depressed as the ward will be safe. The results of the analysis in Table 7.10 show that on average, the higher the Labour vote share once it is greater than 50%, the lower the level of turnout. When the Labour party are especially dominant in a ward election and receive more than 80% of the vote, the average level of turnout in these contests is 32.7%, compared to a turnout of 39.2% when Labour have between 50-60% of the vote. Overall, it seems that as the election becomes increasingly safe for the Labour party, their supporters are not turning out because they believe their vote is not needed. Or perhaps, the supporters of the opposition parties are so downcast about their chances of victory they abstain from voting. Whatever the reasons may be, there is a clear pattern to the level of turnout according to this party political variable.

Table 7.10: The level of turnout according to the Labour party share of the vote in metropolitan wards.

	50-60%	60.1-70%	70.1-80%	More than 80%
1980	40.2 (62)	35.7 (66)	30.8 (43)	34.9 (15)
1982	35.6 (73)	32.3 (48)	30.6 (28)	28.3 (5)
1983	40.8 (72)	37.7 (68)	36.1 (44)	33.8 (19)
1984	40.4 (74)	35.6 (78)	34.9 (54)	33.4 (37)
1986	39.2 (77)	35.1 (86)	33.4 (67)	32.1 (30)
1987	39.8 (87)	37.7 (71)	36.2 (40)	37.6 (18)
1988	41.3 (60)	35.7 (84)	32.9 (79)	31.9 (61)
1990	48.5 (76)	44.0 (75)	41.2 (87)	41.2 (62)
1991	37.9 (76)	35.4 (73)	32.8 (46)	32.9 (20)
1992	27.3 (75)	24.2 (57)	23.3 (32)	22.0 (19)
1994	39.7 (96)	36.2 (91)	34.0 (58)	31.1 (37)
Mean	39.2 (828)	35.4 (797)	33.3 (578)	32.7 (323)

In London, we found that as the Conservative share of the vote increased, the level of turnout declined. In the metropolitan wards, however, there does not seem to be any such relationship between the two variables. Table 7.11 shows that there are instances of high

rates of turnout even when the Conservative party is in a very dominant position in a ward. In 1987 for example, in the wards where the Conservatives had between 70-80% of the vote, even though the closest candidate would be at least 40% of the vote behind, the turnout is on average 52.1%. The corresponding figure for the wards where the Labour party are similarly dominant in the same election is 36.2%.

When comparing the results in Table 7.10 and 7.11, we can see that there were no cases of the Conservative share of the vote being above 80% in a ward, while there were 323 wards where Labour received such a proportion of the vote. This clearly indicates the success of the Labour party in the metropolitan boroughs over this time period. Where the Conservative party is particularly strong, however, and receives more than 50% of the vote, turnout is consistently much higher than it is in when Labour receive the majority of support in a ward. A similar result was also found in London and we do not know for certain why this is the case. There does seem to be some support for the argument that Labour voters are more likely not to vote when their vote is not needed to determine the outcome of the election. There are a relatively small number of wards where the Conservative share of the vote is very high, the electorate in these safe Conservative wards may turn out to vote to preserve their distinctiveness. The ward may be the only one under Conservative control in the borough, hence, the local party is likely to focus upon this ward in an attempt to encourage their supporters to vote.

Table 7.11: The level of turnout according to the Conservative party share of the vote in metropolitan wards.

	50-60%	60.1-70%	70.1-80%
1980	42.2 (39)	42.0 (20)	39.1 (9)
1982	41.8 (50)	43.9 (20)	40.1 (1)
1983	45.0 (36)	44.6 (26)	42.0 (1)
1984	41.9 (49)	43.1 (13)	40.1 (4)
1986	42.6 (29)	44.8 (4)	
1987	49.4 (56)	48.4 (12)	52.1 (4)
1988	41.8 (51)	41.8 (27)	40.6 (5)
1990	50.1 (29)	50.9 (10)	49.9 (3)
1991	46.9 (49)	47.3 (22)	48.0 (5)
1992	39.2 (76)	39.2 (43)	41.3 (12)
1994	42.9 (17)	44.5 (5)	37.8 (1)
Mean	44.0 (481)	44.6 (202)	43.1 (45)

Finally, the relationship between the Liberal Democrat share of the vote and the level of turnout was tested. We have already noted that there were no wards in the metropolitan boroughs where the Conservatives had more than 80% of the votes. Table 7.12 shows that there was only one ward where the Liberal Democrats were that successful. There were only 71 wards that had a Liberal Democrat share of the vote greater than 60%, so we should be careful with our conclusions from this set of data because of the small number of cases involved in the analysis. The results in Table 7.12 show that the level of turnout does not fall as the share of the vote for the Liberal Democrats increases. The average level of turnout is highest at 47.1% in the category containing the wards where the Liberal Democrat share of the vote is between 70-80%. Once again, we can explain this result by referring to the Liberal Democrats acknowledged success in targeting areas and canvassing. The level of turnout could also be high due to the likely prospect of all three major parties competing in a ward. The mean turnout figures are very similar to the ones produced when the Conservatives have a very high share of the vote, while both sets of figures are higher than the average turnout received when the Labour party win the seat.

Table 7.12: The level of turnout according to the Liberal Democrat share of the vote in metropolitan wards.

	50-60%	60.1-70%	70.1-80%	More than 80%
1980	40.5 (11)	42.7 (2)	30.9 (1)	
1982	40.6 (18)		48.0 (1)	
1983	46.8 (12)	48.0 (1)	49.0 (1)	
1984	46.2 (15)	42.6 (2)	41.0 (1)	
1986	45.1 (25)	46.4 (3)	58.0 (1)	
1987	51.4 (21)	53.6 (5)	55.3 (2)	
1988	47.3 (12)	50.0 (1)	43.0 (1)	
1990	50.3 (16)	54.0 (3)		32.0 (1)
1991	48.0 (33)	46.1 (11)	51.0 (1)	
1992	39.3 (26)	38.4 (11)	47.4 (2)	
1994	44.0 (45)	45.2 (20)		
Mean	45.4 (234)	46.7 (59)	47.1 (11)	32.0 (1)

7.8: Testing the relationship between turnout and previous marginality in metropolitan wards.

The final political variable to investigate is the closeness of the previous contest and its relationship to the level of turnout. The marginality variable was recoded into categories so we could investigate if there were higher levels of turnout when the previous contest was defined as being 'very marginal' (less than 5% difference between the top two candidates) as against 'very safe' wards, where the winning candidate has more than a 35% lead over the person in second place. As was the case in London, we used the closeness of the ward contests in 1980 (the first election in our data-set) to produce a measure for marginality for this election. As a result of re-organisation, if the previous election was used, we would not be comparing like with like.

Table 7.13 does appear to show a relationship between the level of turnout and marginality. If we compare the levels of turnout at the extreme ends of the marginality scale, the level is over seven percentage points higher when the previous contests were 'very marginal' than in

'very safe' contests. The rate of turnout seems to decline only when one party won the previous election by more then 25 percentage points. This observation raises two points. Firstly, it could signify that electors realised that the ward election was not going to be closely fought. The electorate may, therefore, feel that their vote would be wasted if they turned out and voted for a party that they knew was probably not going to win. The second point is that local elections are known to be potentially volatile political events, in so much that at the ward level, it is often difficult for a sitting councillor to feel secure. Hence, the turnout rates are roughly similar in contests where the parties are within 25 percentage points of each other. Before the exceptional results of the 1997 general election, a winning lead of 25% at the national level may have been regarded as a significant majority. At the local level, such a margin should rarely be adjudged safe.

Table 7.13: The level of turnout according to the previous marginality of wards in the metropolitan boroughs.

	Less than 5%	5-10%	10.1-15%	15.1-25%	25.1-35%	More than 35%
1980	39.0 (43)	40.5 (31)	40.2 (35)	38.9 (55)	39.1 (61)	37.6 (128)
1982	42.2 (57)	40.5 (41)	39.0 (35)	38.9 (77)	38.4 (72)	34.9 (155)
1983	45.8 (64)	45.1 (49)	44.3 (41)	43.1 (100)	40.9 (87)	37.1 (92)
1984	45.7 (60)	44.0 (45)	41.8 (51)	39.7 (71)	38.1 (60)	36.4 (144)
1986	44.1 (64)	44.0 (53)	44.3 (41)	41.3 (79)	38.3 (80)	35.2 (175)
1987	47.5 (70)	49.4 (57)	50.1 (53)	47.3 (83)	43.0 (62)	38.0 (177)
1988	44.0 (64)	44.0 (58)	41.5 (52)	39.2 (96)	38.2 (83)	34.4 (148)
1990	51.0 (58)	50.0 (54)	50.4 (48)	49.2 (62)	46.5 (52)	43.0 (210)
1991	46.4 (50)	46.8 (47)	46.8 (46)	46.5 (63)	42.2 (64)	36.4 (214)
1992	34.7 (68)	38.3 (51)	36.8 (43)	34.9 (86)	33.6 (78)	27.7 (154)
1994	40.2 (60)	41.0 (53)	40.7 (57)	40.0 (82)	38.9 (87)	37.8 (146)
Mean	43.7 (658)	44.0 (539)	43.3 (502)	41.7 (854)	39.7 (786)	36.2 (1743)

Cross-tabulations were conducted between the level of turnout and the previous marginality variable using the same categories that were employed in the analysis of turnout at the ward level in London. These results in Table 7.14 show yet again that there are higher levels of turnout when the marginality at the previous election is small. In 1986, for example, where the marginality in the ward elections was less than 5%, 65% of wards had a level of turnout

greater than 45% in 1987. At the other end of the spectrum, we can also detect a strong inverse relationship between the two variables. In the elections of 1987, where a candidate had a majority over the second placed candidate of more than 35%, hence a 'very safe' ward, only 5% of cases had a turnout greater than 45% in the next election held in 1988. The results from testing bivariate relationships, however, can only go so far. We now need to test these relationships and other associations, by using statistical methods such as correlation and multiple regression.

Table 7.14: Cross-tabulation between turnout and previous marginality in metropolitan wards.

	Margin less than 5% Percentage of cases with turnout greater than 45%	Margin greater than 35% Percentage of cases with turnout greater than 45%
1980	49	43
1982	43	23
1983	65	22
1984	58	20
1986	44	7
1987	65	8
1988	44	5
1990	78	32
1991	47	9
1992	19	8
1994	16	17

7.9: Correlations between political/structural variables and turnout in metropolitan wards.

Table 7.15 shows that there are a number of political variables that produce consistently strong correlations with the dependent variable, turnout. The variables, CONSH and CENSH produced positive correlations with turnout, while LABSH produced negative coefficients. Similar results were found in the London wards. This suggests that there is a consistent positive relationship between CONSH and CENSH and turnout - the higher the share of the vote for these two parties in a ward, the higher the level of turnout. The higher

the vote share for Labour in a ward, ceteris paribus, the lower the resulting level of turnout. These results are not surprising considering the findings of our earlier bivariate analysis in section 7.7, but they do offer statistical support to our previous hypotheses. Correlations also provide us with some idea of the strength of the relationship between political/structural variables and turnout.

Table 7.15: Correlation coefficients produced between political/structural variables and turnout in metropolitan wards.

	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
CENSH	.28	.35	.43	.48	.49	.48	.47	.39	.41	.34	.38
CONSH	.38	.50	.44	.29	.39	.44	.40	.39	.48	.52	.45
ELECT					.10	.11		.17	.11		
GREENSH			.10		.22	.17	.14	.10	.09		-.11
LABSH	-.51	-.63	-.66	-.58	-.63	-.70	-.64	-.62	-.75	-.78	-.64
MARGIN	-.14	-.16	-.17	-.18	-.53	-.61	-.50	-.52	-.66	-.18	-.17
MAJOR	.26	.29	.29	.26	.60	.46	.50	.66	.66	.39	.63
NUMCAND			.18	.13	.44	.27	.39	.54	.55	.21	.35
POPD	-.25	-.13			-.18	-.18		-.14	-.25	-.14	-.23

(Only the variables which achieved significance at the 5% level or above are included).

The correlation coefficients between the ELECT variable and turnout are weak. This result is not surprising as we did not seem to discover any relationship between these two variables in section 7.6. The small correlation coefficients reflect the nature of the wards in the metropolitan boroughs. They are three-member wards in mostly urban areas with large populations. Hence, there will be little chance of wards being very small in size. There was also no relationship found between the size of the electorate in wards and the level of turnout in London. It is likely that ELECT will be more influential in the shire districts, where the size of the electorate in wards are much smaller. The variable measuring population density (POPD) produced negative correlation coefficients with turnout, but they were small and insignificant in three elections.

Finally, there are two political variables that provide strong coefficients with the dependent variable, turnout. The first is MAJOR, where the positive correlation coefficients ranging

from .26 to .66 lend support to the earlier proposition that this could be an important determinant of turnout. The second variable is the measure for marginality (MARGIN), that produced a significant negative correlation coefficient in every election and a range of figures between -.14 and -.66.

7.10: Correlations between socio-economic variables and turnout in metropolitan wards.

This section will discuss whether any similarly strong relationships can be found between the socio-economic variables and turnout. Correlations were produced between the socio-economic variables and the level of turnout to ascertain the strength and direction of the relationships between these variables. The results in Table 7.16 show that there were consistent negative relationships between a number of census variables and turnout. These included the variables SEG3M, SEG4 and SEG5, as well as the level of unemployment in a ward. There were also negative correlations between the council tenant variable and the level of turnout, and some evidence of negative relationships between surrogate indicators of income, for example, having no car, no bath, no exclusive use of a w.c. and overcrowding housing.

Positive correlations were found between turnout and SEG1, SEG2, SEG3N, as well as the owner occupier variable. The three variables that measured the age of the electorate in a ward produced interesting results. While the YOUTH variable produced consistently negative correlations, the variable indicating the proportion of students (STUDENTS) produced positive coefficients with the turnout variable. Finally, the OAP variable also showed positive correlations. These results lead us to generalise that turnout is likely to be dependent upon the age composition of a metropolitan ward. This conclusion is broadly in line with perceived wisdom at the individual level which suggests that the older you until you reach 'old age', the more likelihood there is of turning out to vote, however, the positive coefficients between the OAP variable and turnout are unexpected.

Finally, the variable measuring migration (MIGRANTS) produced a number of significant correlation coefficients that were negatively related to the level of turnout. This finding is consistent with the results from the analysis of London wards. As the 'costs' of registering to vote and actually voting are likely to be higher for those who are new to an area, this may help to explain the figures. These 'migrants' are also likely to take some time to feel part of the local community and so may not vote in the first election for which they are eligible to do so.

Table 7.16: Correlation coefficients produced between socio-economic variables and turnout in metropolitan wards.

	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
AGRIC		.17	.18	.16		.17			.13	.17	
COUNCIL	-.53	-.54	-.56	-.47	-.46	-.52	-.44	-.37	-.45	-.52	-.37
MIGRANTS		-.12	-.11	-.11	-.10	-.14	-.14	-.14	-.26	-.10	-.27
NCWP				-.13							
NOBATH	-.15										
NOCAR	-.46	-.51	-.50	-.33	-.29	-.41	-.32	-.26	-.40	-.50	-.33
NOEXWC	-.15	-.11								-.10	
OAP		.10	.13	.10	.14	.17	.16	.13	.16	.20	.15
OVERCRO	-.36	-.39	-.37	-.28	-.16	-.26	-.15	-.09	-.16	-.20	-.09
OWNOCC	.57	.57	.59	.42	.39	.48	.39	.33	.45	.54	.38
SEG1	.41	.47	.14	.12	.39	.44	.31	.33	.41	.29	.39
SEG2	.47	.50	.14	.12	.45	.49	.36	.43	.48	.31	.44
SEG3M	-.25	-.31			-.24	-.27	-.25	-.18	-.24	-.18	-.25
SEG3N	.43	.37			.30	.31	.25	.30	.26	.20	.23
SEG4	-.42	-.41			-.35	-.41	-.35	-.32	-.43	-.22	-.43
SEG5	-.43	-.38	-.21	-.18	-.34	-.41	-.35	-.33	-.50	-.27	-.50
STUDENT	.36	.44	.40	.36		.15	.12	.10			
UNEMP	-.57	-.49	-.51	-.28	-.29	-.39	-.33	-.27	-.41	-.52	-.36
YOUTH	-.34	-.34	-.40	-.16	-.29	-.41	-.33	-.29	-.42	-.49	-.36

(Only the variables which achieved significance at the 5% level or above are included).

The results of the correlations show the direction and strength of the possible relationships between our independent variables and turnout. As it has been illustrated throughout this thesis, correlation coefficients do not themselves constitute firm evidence of a relationship. We now need to use multivariate analysis to unravel which variables are important

determinants of turnout, and how much all the political, structural and socio-economic variables combined can contribute in explaining the variation in local election turnout.

7.11: Multivariate analysis of turnout using the political and structural variables in metropolitan wards.

When a regression analysis was carried out at the metropolitan borough level using just the political and structural variables, five variables were successfully entered into the regression equations. The variable, NOCOUN, was the best explanatory variable of the variation in turnout, because it entered into the regression equation in every election except 1994. At the ward level, eleven political or structural variables entered into at least one regression equation over the fourteen year period. Table 7.17 shows that the r^2 figure varies between a value of 33% in 1980 to a high of 68% in 1992. In this latter election, the variable measuring the Labour party share of the vote was the most important variable as it entered the regression equation first and explained 61% of the variation in the dependent variable. Elect was the second variable to enter bringing the r^2 up to 65%. When the variables, OTHSH and POPD proceeded to enter, the regression equation in this election explained more than two thirds of the variation in turnout in the metropolitan wards. The average r^2 figure using just the political and structural variables as independent variables was 50%.

Over all the elections, the most important explanatory variables were Labour's share of the vote (LABSH) and the variable measuring previous marginality (MARGIN). Making inferences from the results in Table 7.17, we can say that the higher the share of the vote for the Labour party in a ward, and, therefore, the safer the seat for Labour, the lower the level of turnout. Also, for the previous marginality variable, we would expect to find higher levels of turnout when the result of the previous contest was close.

The only other variable that entered into a number of regression equations was ELECT. Turnout was negatively related to the ward electorate, which means that the smaller the

ward, the higher the turnout. This variable did not seem to show any relationship with turnout in section 7.6 and the results in Table 7.17 are not very strong.

Table 7.17: Explaining the variation in turnout using the political and structural variables in metropolitan wards.

	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
LABSH	-.51	-.57	-.56	-.62		-.47	-.48	-.39	-.41	-.75	-.59
POPD	-.14					-.08			-.09	-.05	
OTHSH	-.15									-.12	-.10
MARGIN	-.10	-.15	-.25	-.22	-.30	-.27	-.24	-.28	-.30	-.15	-.14
ELECT	-.09	-.09	-.08			-.07	-.16		-.14	-.16	-.12
CONSH				-.22	-.25				.11		.18
CENSH					.36	.12					
GREENSH					.11				.07		
VACS					-.07						
NUMCAND						.09					-.08
MAJOR							.16	.24	.23		
Constant	53.8	50.1	54.2	54.9	39	53.1	47.0	48.1	45.7	53.8	54.3
r^2 (%)	33	42	49	40	48	55	48	48	66	68	50

7.12: Multivariate analysis of turnout using the socio-economic variables in metropolitan wards.

Section 7.10 showed that the correlations between some of the socio-economic variables and turnout were consistently strong. The two variables measuring the type of housing, COUNCIL and OWNOCC, produced average correlations over the eleven elections of -.48 and .46 respectively. The socio-economic groupings also seemed to be quite important variables with SEG1, SEG2 and SEG3N providing positive correlations and SEG3M, SEG4 and SEG5 producing negative coefficients. The variable measuring the extent of unemployment also had consistent correlation coefficients with the dependent variable, turnout. We would, therefore, expect that these variables may be the ones that enter into the regression equations.

The amount of r^2 explained by the socio-economic variables varied between a low of 22% in 1992 to 54% in 1991. SEG3M was the first variable to enter the regression equation in 1991. It explained 44% of the variation in turnout. The second most important explanatory variable was YOUTH which added an extra 4% to the r^2 figure when it was next to enter. The addition of another seven socio-economic variables into the regression equation brought the r^2 up to 54%. The average r^2 over the eleven elections was 39%.

Table 7.18 shows that eighteen socio-economic variables entered into at least one regression equation over the time period. The variable, SEG3N, SEG3M, the council housing variable and the youth variable all entered into the regression analysis the most number of times with eight appearances apiece. Hence, we can infer from this that in metropolitan wards with high levels of manual workers and council housing, the level of turnout is likely to be low.

Table 7.18: Explaining the variation in turnout using the socio-economic variables in metropolitan wards.

	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
OWNOCC	.17	.38									
UNEMP	-.80		.36	.63					-.44	.23	-.49
NOCAR	.44		-1.20	-.99	.23	.12			.33		
AGRIC	.17										
OVERCRO	.26		.46	.35				.35	.19		.32
SEG3N	.28		-.22		.24	.26	.32	.33	.20		.33
SEG3M	-.21	-.17			-.26	-.38	-.36	-.29	-.24		-.36
OAP		.10	.40	.30							
SEG2		.24							.19		
STUDENT			-.20								
SEG4			.23								
COUNCIL			-.25	-.25	-.49	-.41	-.35	-.34	-.28	-.41	
NOEXWC			-.17	-.19				-.09			
YOUTH			.15		-.30	-.30	-.20	-.25	.18	-.36	-.18
SEG1				-.20			-.17				
SEG5				-.24							
NCWP								-.20			
MIGRANTS									-.26		-.18
Constant	33.4	27.6	56.6	55.4	56.8	65.4	56.2	60.7	56.7	82.0	56.7
r^2 (%)	47	40	28	26	44	48	36	38	54	22	50

7.13: Multivariate analysis of turnout using all the independent variables in metropolitan wards.

Table 7.19 shows the results of the regression analysis using all the independent variables and suggests that there is a wide range of variables that can help to explain the variation in turnout. The political variables that were important when they were analysed on their own, continue to be influential when the socio-economic variables are also included in the analysis. For example, MARGIN enters into the regression equation ten times, while LABSH makes eight appearances. Hence, the closer the contest in the last ward elections, other things being equal, the higher the level of turnout in the following election. Also, high levels of turnout are unlikely to be produced in wards where the Labour party is strong.

Other political variables that help to explain some of the differences in turnout are the strength of the Liberal Democrat share of the vote (CENSH) and the variable measuring the number of major parties in a contest. This means that the higher the percentage support for the Liberal Democrats and the more parties that contest a ward, the higher the level of turnout.

The amount of r^2 explained by all the variables has a range of 26 percentage points. The independent variables in the data-set explain 50% of the variation in the level of turnout in 1982, but the r^2 rises to an impressive 76% in 1992. In this election, the variable LABSH was the first variable to enter the equation explaining 61% of the variation in turnout. SEG4 was the second variable to enter explaining an additional 4% of the variation in turnout. Nine other independent variables entered into the regression equation in 1992 to bring the r^2 up to 76%. So, we have managed to explain more than three quarters of the variation in the dependent variable by using our political, structural and socio-economic variables. This is a respectable result to find, as we have emphasised throughout this thesis that there are likely to be many determinants of turnout, some of which can not be easily defined and put into a regression equation. An average r^2 of 60% is achieved when all the variables are included in the analysis.

Although at best more than 75% of the variation in turnout can be explained, there is still room for improving the regression equations. We do not expect to improve our explanation by much in some elections, but there are variables that could be added in an election that may help to increase the level of r^2. Before we attempt to uncover these variables by using qualitative research techniques, we shall examine those wards that do not fit into the equation and try to determine the reasons for their behaviour. It is hoped that the results of this analysis will help to improve the predictability of the regression equations.

Table 7.19 Explaining the variation in turnout using all the independent variables in metropolitan wards.

	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994
CENSH	.24	.15	.20		.20	.15	.10				
UNEMP	-.94	-.29	-.46						-.29	-.48	-.42
OVERCRO	.38		.30				.14		.09	.23	.28
CONSH	.15			-.22							
NOCAR	.54			.39	.59	.35	.36		.33	.48	
AGRIC	.11			.15							
SEG3N	.23				.10	.14	.15	.20			.21
ELECT	-.29			.44	.19						
NUMCAND	.09							.29			
SEG2	.21	.12						.21		.22	
MAJOR	.11	.13	.13				.09	.11	.19		.08
LABSH		-.13		-.43		-.26	-.28	-.16	-.33	-.54	-.34
MARGIN		-.15	-.26	-.29	-.34	-.27	-.26	-.32	-.28	-.14	-.11
SEG3M		-.21	-.12	-.26	-.25	-.23	-.20	-.25	-.21	-.12	-.31
NCWP		.10									
SEG5			.20								
OAP			.16			-.10					
MIGRANTS			-.18	-.43	-.09		-.17			-.17	-.16
SEG1			.22					-.28			
OWNOCC			.16		.52				.28		
YOUTH				.13	-.21	-.27	-.13	-.16			
COUNCIL				-.33		-.26	-.28			-.16	
NOEXWC				-.13				-.15	-.07		
POPD					-.13	-.08			-.07		
VACS					-.11			-.18	-.06		
SEG4					-.20					-.11	
GREENSH					-.09						
INDSH							-.08		.08		
STUDENT									-.13	-.07	-.12
Constant	30.3	36.9	32.6	41.4	36.4	68.3	48.2	57.1	40.5	47.0	52.3
r^2 (%)	54	50	60	51	59	64	56	58	72	76	59

7.14: Analysing the residuals in metropolitan wards.

215 wards were identified as outliers (more than plus or minus two standard deviations away from the line of best fit). They were quite evenly distributed throughout the elections in our data-set. The smallest number of wards appeared in 1982 (fourteen), while there

were 24 cases in the 1986 election. The residuals were distributed across the metropolitan boroughs, with only three boroughs in our data-set not having at least one residual ward. This indicates that even though a borough may always produce an average level of turnout, every borough may contain wards which are defined in this analysis as residual.

Although there is a wide spread of outlier wards across the metropolitan boroughs, some boroughs have quite a high proportion of wards relative to the total. We would expect to find the residual wards within a borough to be either positive or negative residuals and not a mixture of the two. The results, however, are not so clear cut. The metropolitan borough of Sefton had the most number of residual wards with 26, which amounted to 12% of the total. All but one of these wards provided a negative residual, which means that 25 wards had a level of turnout in an election lower than that predicted by the regression equations. This is interesting in the light of that borough's mixed social composition.

There were seven other boroughs that had more than 5% of the residual wards. All the wards in Bury (8% of the total) were positive residual wards, while Sandwell (8%) provided just negative residual wards. All the other boroughs, however, did not produce such consistent results. Wirral (6%) for example, had one negative residual amongst all positive ones. Wigan (6%) had the completely opposite picture, with all negative residuals and one ward having a turnout higher than predicted. Bolton (6%) produced two negative residual wards, along with eleven wards that posted higher than expected rates of turnout. The two remaining boroughs present a conundrum. St. Helens (7%) had fifteen residuals over the eleven election period. Seven of these wards had turnouts higher than predicted, while the other eight were lower than predicted. Finally, Sheffield (6%) also produced a mixture of outlier wards. The borough had five wards with rates of turnout higher than those predicted by the model and seven lower than predicted. These are surprising results to find because we would not expect the level of turnout to vary so much within a local authority. It was not surprising, however, to find that the eight boroughs mentioned above, apart from St.

Helens, all appeared as residuals at the local authority level on two or more occasions (Table 5.36).

The residuals were then examined in each election to see whether we could identify a pattern. We began by examining the wards with higher than predicted levels of turnout. We wanted to see if any ward appeared more than once as a residual furthest away from the regression line. We did not expect to find many instances because there are only eleven elections in which a ward can appear more than once. More importantly, there are always going to be local issues, special campaigns by local political parties, and other factors that can raise the turnout in any one contest and are unlikely to be repeated.

Table 7.20 shows that there was one ward, Ramsbottom from Bury, whose turnout was the furthest away from what the regression equation predicted in two elections (1988 and 1992). Between 1983 and 1992, the turnout in the ward has remained above 50%. An interview with the council's press and public relations officer informed us that this was not the first time he had been asked to explain the high turnout in the area. He noted that Ramsbottom has always been an independent place with the electorate showing more allegiance to the ward rather than Bury Metropolitan Council. The ward has witnessed a number of new developments in the last fifteen years including the opening of the East Lancashire Steam Railway in 1987. This has lead to a significant amount of tourism and related 'spin-offs'. Ramsbottom was described as a 'quality of life town' which makes it desirable for commuters to Manchester. The respondent argued that there has always been great interest in local politics in the area but he could not explain why this was the case. There is a Ramsbottom edition of the local paper and the ward has a very high local profile in the media which may help to account for the high turnout. Finally, the three major parties are active in the ward and Ramsbottom has been represented by all three parties over the last fifteen years.

The exceptional turnout rates in other wards in Table 7.20 can be partly explained. For instance, in 1990 the University ward in Bradford had a turnout of 55%. In section 4.3.3, we noted that Bradford set the lowest poll tax of all metropolitan boroughs so this could have been a contributory factor. The ward result showed that the sitting Conservative councillor received only 24% of the vote and was ousted by the Labour candidate who received more than 67% of the vote. A representative from the council informed us that there was a very strong Labour campaign. Finally, there is a high Asian population in the ward and the winning candidate was a Mr. Ajeeb Mohammed.

Table 7.20: The residual metropolitan wards with a rate of turnout furthest above the predicted level in every election.

Year	Ward	Borough	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1980	Lightshaw	Wigan	49	34.2	15.2
1982	South Wortley	Sheffield	49	34.2	14.5
1983	Brinnington	Stockport	58	46.2	11.7
1984	Bessacarr	Doncaster	57	42.3	14.4
1986	Todmorden	Calderdale	57	41.1	15.7
1987	Central and Falinge	Rochdale	64	46.8	16.7
1988	Ramsbottom	Bury	56	41.2	15.0
1990	University	Bradford	55	45.9	9.5
1991	Blackrod	Bolton	54	42.4	11.6
1992	Ramsbottom	Bury	52	38.2	13.5
1994	Horwich	Bolton	54	41.2	12.9

Table 7.21 shows that there is more consistency to the wards that appear the furthest away below the regression line compared to the high turnout residual wards. For instance, there are three wards, Hindley Green from Wigan, Hateley Heath from Sandwell and Kew from Sefton, that all appear twice in the table. There is obviously something special about these wards that make their turnout rates much lower than we would predict with knowledge of the wards political, structural and socio-economic situation. Hence, there is a need for qualitative investigation in order to fill the gap in the explanation of turnout variation.

Table 7.21: The residual metropolitan wards with a rate of turnout furthest below the predicted level in every election.

Year	Ward	Borough	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1980	Hindley Green	Wigan	18	33.3	-15.8
1982	Chadderton North	Oldham	24	34.1	-18.6
1983	Hateley Heath	Sandwell	28	39.8	-12.0
1984	Hateley Heath	Sandwell	22	38.5	-17.0
1986	Shirley West	Solihull	31	42.6	-12.1
1987	Hindley Green	Wigan	28		-12.6
1988	Kew	Sefton	34	49.5	-15.3
1990	Coldhurst	Oldham	32	51.7	-19.6
1991	Kew	Sefton	38	51.2	-13.0
1992	Leigh East	Wigan	20	31.7	-11.4
1994	Dukes	Sefton	36	46.3	-10.5

We know from the results in Table 7.21 that there are three wards that appear more than twice with turnout rates much lower than predicted. We wanted to take this analysis a step further by examining if there were any wards that appeared as residuals more than twice. If there are such wards, then perhaps a way to re-specify the model could be discovered by concentrating our analysis on these residual wards. Table 7.22 shows those wards that fit our criteria.

There are nineteen wards that appear as a residual more than twice out of the eleven elections. The Kew ward from Sefton manages the most number of entries with eight, while two other wards from Sefton appear as residuals in seven elections. The two wards that were used as examples of low turnout wards in section 7.4, Hateley Heath and Princes End from Sandwell make five and four appearances respectively in Table 7.22. Of course, just because these wards have extremely low levels of turnout, it does not necessarily mean that they will appear as statistical outliers. This is because the political make-up, the structure and the socio-economic composition of these wards may have meant that the turnout was expected to be low. To illustrate this point, the two high turnout wards in section 7.3, South Marple (Stockport) and Flixton (Trafford), do not appear in the list of wards which had more than two appearances as a residual. While Flixton is defined as being a residual in two

elections, South Marple does not appear as a residual in any election. The high level of turnout in this ward was predicted by the regression because of its political, structural and socio-economic make-up.

Table 7.22: The metropolitan wards that make more than two appearances as a residual between 1980 and 1994 (eleven elections).

Ward (Borough)	Number of appearances	Positive residual year	Negative residual year
Kew (Sefton)	8		1983/4/7/8, 1990/1/2/4
Cambridge (Sefton)	7		1983/4/7/8, 1991/2/4
Dukes (Sefton)	7		1983/6/7/8, 1990/1/4
Moorside (Bury)	6	1986/7/8, 1990/1/2	
Ramsbottom (Bury)	5	1986/7/8, 1990/2	
Todmorden (Calderdale)	5	1986/7/8, 1991/4	
Hateley Heath (Sandwell)	5		1980/2/3/4/6
Palfrey (Walsall)	5	1986/7/8, 1991/2	
Chadderton North (Oldham)	4		1980/2/3, 1990
Princes End (Sandwell)	4		1982/3/4/7
Horwich (Bolton)	3	1991/2/4	
South East (Doncaster)	3		1990/1/4
Barwick and Kippax (Leeds)	3	1987, 1992/4	
Shirley West (Solihull)	3		1986/7/8
Grange Park (St. Helens)	3		1982/6/7
Newton West (St. Helens)	3	1986, 1991/2	
Brinnington (Stockport)	3	1983, 1991/2	
Winstanley (Wigan)	3		1990/1/4
Prenton (Wirral)	3	1986, 1991/4	

The final part of the residual analysis aimed to discover why some of the wards in Table 7.22 had consistently unexpected levels of turnout. We focused on two of the wards, Kew from the borough of Sefton and Todmorden from Calderdale. These wards were not only chosen because of their obvious deviancy, they have eight and six appearances as residuals respectively, but also because of their direction of deviancy. The Kew ward always produces a level of turnout lower than the regression predicts, while the situation in Todmorden is the opposite, with the ward producing higher than expected rates of turnout.

Table 7.23 shows that there is an average turnout of 38% in Kew, but the regression equations predict an average turnout more than ten percentage points higher than this figure. What are the reason(s) for this situation? The turnout in Kew is not really anything special for the borough, because the ward has never produced the lowest ward turnout within the borough. The ward has changed hands a number of times in the last 20 years, from the Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats and back and forth. Kew has never, therefore, been regarded as a safe ward for any party. Another potential factor to help explain the turnout deviancy, is that one party does not politically dominate the borough in terms of representation. The metropolitan borough has been under 'no overall control' since 1986. It seems, therefore, that the political situation does not seem to be an important factor, and so the only explanation can be cultural or socio-economic. There must be something special about the borough of Sefton, that makes a proportion of its electorate, in the Kew ward especially, not interested in voting in the local elections. Sefton did after all provide us with 12% of all the outlier wards. Without some sort of qualitative examination, there does not seem to be anything special about Kew in particular that we can ascertain from the statistics.

Officials from Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council were interviewed to help with the explanation behind the turnout figures in Kew. A couple of pieces of local knowledge assist in understanding the behaviour of the ward . Firstly, the Kew ward contains the largest housing developments that are taking place in the borough. Houses have been built continuously in this ward for the last 20 years. This means that the electorate in the ward is increasing faster in Kew than anywhere else in the borough. We can only speculate on the effect this development may have on the level of turnout, but it is harder for a feeling of 'community' to exist in a ever changing ward like Kew. This is because when a large proportion of the residents are new, they will probably not have the same sort of attachment to the area that people who have lived in the ward for a longer time may have. In a well-established ward, there would have been opportunities for the electorate to attend local events, go to meetings that discuss changes to the local area and other factors that lead to a sense of belonging. The absence of these factors in Kew could result in the lower than

expected level of turnout at election time. The negative correlations between turnout and the migration variable (MIGRANTS) in Table 7.16 provide statistical backing for this view.

The other potentially contributory factor is the location of the ward. Kew is situated in Southport, which is on the fringe of the borough. This detachment may lead to a sense of being alienated from where the decisions are taken that affect their lives. Finally, our respondent suggested that the level of turnout could be low in the ward because of the quality of the candidates, but what makes Kew and Sefton different from other wards and boroughs with similar candidates which produce much higher rates of turnout?

Table 7.23: Actual and predicted levels of turnout in the Kew ward (Sefton).

Year	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1982	**38**	**44.0**	**-6.5**
1983	36	47.8	-11.4
1984	39	50.2	-11.3
1986	**40**	**48.3**	**-8.5**
1987	43	54.2	-11.1
1988	34	49.5	-15.3
1990	43	54.6	-11.2
1991	38	51.2	-13.0
1992	31	41.6	-10.4
1994	38	46.5	-9.0
Mean	38	48.8	-10.8

(The figures in bold are not residuals using the limits of being +/- 2 standard deviations away).
(Not all elections are included because of missing data).

What can be suggested to explain the consistently high levels of turnout in Todmorden? This ward is in complete contrast to Kew, because as Table 7.24 shows, on average, it returns a turnout more than 10 percentage points higher than the model predicted. In six out of the eight elections in the table, the ward has the highest turnout in the borough. If a local issue was important, or another such topic was dominant for the short life-time of an election, then we would expect the turnout to be particularly high in one year. Perhaps at most, the effect could last for two elections before the issue dies away. In Todmorden,

however, the turnout is always above 50% with the exception of a rate of 46% in 1992. Similar results can be found going back further in time. Before 1974 when Calderdale Borough Council came into existence, Todmorden Borough Council produced high levels of turnout. What explanation can be given for this situation in Todmorden?

There seem to be two political variables that help to explain such a high level of voter participation in this ward. The first is one that should have been accounted for in the regression, that of marginality. Labour have controlled the ward since 1986, but many of the contests have been extremely close. In 1991 just over ten percentage points separated the three major parties. The variable measuring marginality (MARGIN) was defined in the earlier analysis as the difference between the winning party's share of the vote and the second placed party at the previous election. A problem with the operationalisation of this variable is that it fails to take account of the vote for the third placed party. One could conclude from the analysis of the political contests in the ward that the level of political competition in this ward may help to explain why the turnout is particularly high.

Another factor that could be influential in determining the level of turnout in this contest is the question of who holds power in the metropolitan borough. Calderdale has been under 'no overall control' since 1980, with the exception of 1991-2 when Labour were briefly the administration on their own. It could be hypothesised, therefore, that the closeness of the contest not just at the ward level, but also at the local authority level may be part of the reason for the behaviour of this ward.

Table 7.24: Actual and predicted levels of turnout in the Todmorden ward (Calderdale).

Year	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1980	**51**	**44.5**	**6.7**
1986	57	41.1	15.7
1987	57	46.2	11.2
1988	56	43.5	12.3
1990	55	45.9	9.5
1991	55	43.6	10.9
1992	**46**	**38.1**	**7.5**
1994	52	40.1	12.2
Mean	53.6	42.9	10.8

(The figures in bold are not residuals using the limits of being +/- 2 standard deviations away).
(Not all elections are included because of missing data).

A representative from Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council was interviewed to see if any social, cultural or political factors could be suggested to explain the high turnout in Todmorden. She reported that the ward is socially mixed, with a small town centre consisting of a number of terraced properties, contrasting with larger houses with land and farms outside of the town. From a geographical perspective, the ward, like Kew to an extent, is situated out on a limb. It is twelve or thirteen miles from Halifax, the administrative town for the borough and is on the boundary with Lancashire. The respondent suggested that because of its location the ward has closer links to Lancashire rather than West Yorkshire. We mentioned above that the contests in Todmorden are closely fought between the parties. This is partly the result of the political parties putting a lot of work into the ward by carrying out a great deal of canvassing. The candidates in the elections are very much Todmorden people. Whilst in other areas, candidates may not live in the ward they are standing for, in Todmorden it seems to be an unwritten requirement that they live in the ward. A final factor that was suggested to explain the high turnout in the ward was that the town council is very strong, i.e. community identity. Our respondent believed that because the council made their voice heard, this could influence the number of people turning out to vote.

7.15: Conclusions.

This chapter has investigated the turnout rates in metropolitan wards and has shown throughout each stage of analysis, that there is a significant amount of variation in turnout. This variation in the rates of voter participation can not only exist across the wards and boroughs in our data-set, but also exist within a borough. We have discovered that an average turnout in a borough can disguise large differences in the participation rate at the lower level of aggregation. Not only is there a huge range between the turnout in wards over time, we have shown that it can be as much as 50 percentage points, there also seems to be a pattern to the wards that appear to have particularly high or low levels of turnout.

We have attempted to discover which variables are influential in determining the level of turnout. Hypotheses have been constructed and tested using political, structural and socio-economic variables. The political variables seem to be quite important in helping to explain the variation in turnout. The results showed that the number of major parties which contest an election, and the party share of the vote can help to explain why turnout is higher or lower in some wards than in others. The closeness of the previous ward contest was also shown to be an important determinant of turnout. Structural variables such as the size of the ward electorate do not seem to be very important. As for the socio-economic variables, it seemed that the SEG variables and the type of housing had the most influence on the dependent variable. For example, wards with a high composition of their electorate categorised as being in SEG1 and SEG2 and with a significant majority of the electorate owning their own homes, would be likely to have a higher turnout, other things being equal, than wards with a high rate of unemployment and a large proportion of council tenants.

When a regression analysis was carried out which included all the independent variables, it showed that these variables can help to explain up to three quarters of the variation in the level of turnout. What was particularly noticeable, however, was the large number of wards that the regression equation could not explain. These residual wards came largely from the

boroughs that were found to be residual in our analysis at the borough level. It was concluded that qualitative methods were the key to giving a full answer to this research question. A statistical analysis can only go so far, it also needs to be complemented by specialist knowledge of the residual wards. This valuable information was sought from interviewing local people including councillors and officers. The analysis of the residuals showed that some reasons could be suggested for the behaviour of residual wards, but sometimes there was no possible explanation to fill the gap of explaining the reasons why turnout can be 'deviant'. Explanatory variables are often unique to a particular ward and can not be accounted for in the regression equations. For the time being then, we have to be satisfied with explaining the majority of the variation in turnout in the metropolitan wards and recognise that there is room for improvement. The analysis of turnout variation in English local elections, and for that matter, any elections in any country, will always suffer the weakness of not being able to find all the possible determinants. As long as this factor is recognised, such a problem is not very restrictive because the determinants of turnout that are found at the ward level are often the most interesting factors to unearth.

Chapter 8: Explaining turnout variation in district wards.

8.1: Introduction.

This chapter investigates the variation in turnout in wards within the English district councils. The data-set is composed of the three all-out elections of 1983, 1987 and 1991. There are 296 districts in each election. Our analysis only includes those wards that have remained the same over time. Excluding wards where there is missing data and wards which are uncontested, there are a total of 10,030 cases in the data-set . This makes the data-set nearly three times as large as the one used in the analysis of London wards in Chapter 6.

We have noted in the previous two chapters that there are great differences between the structure of wards within a type of local authority. The wards in the districts are similar further still as there is a wide disparity between the size of electorates. The ward with the smallest registered electorate, 192 in 1991, is Chenies from the district of Cherwell. The ward with the largest electorate is Nene Valley, Northampton, which had 14,774 people on the electoral roll in 1991. This chapter will examine how wards can differ in their political, structural and socio-economic make-up and then investigate which variables, if any, influence the level of turnout. Before we study the determinants of turnout in the district wards, we shall begin by providing an overview of the rates of voter participation between 1983 and 1991.

8.2: Historical background to turnout rates in district wards.

The three all-out elections in our data-set have produced average levels of turnout within quite a small band of figures. Table 8.1 shows that there is a difference of just over two percentage points between the lowest election turnout of 46.3% in 1983 and the highest of 48.5% in 1987. Not only are the average rates of voter participation consistent between

elections, but the minimum and maximum figures are also relatively constant. The lowest turnout at the ward level in elections varies between 16.3% and 22.1% - a range of just less than six percentage points. The maximum turnout figures in the elections vary between 73.8% in 1983 and 74.1% in 1987 - less than a half a percentage point difference. These are extremely high rates of turnout for local elections and are much higher than the equivalent figures in London and the metropolitan wards.

The overall average turnout for the district wards is 47.6%. This is more than two percentage points higher than the figure found in the London wards and more than seven percentage points higher than the average in the metropolitan wards. What reasons can be suggested to explain the high rate of turnout in the district wards? The three elections in the data-set are all-out elections which are held every four years. These elections are regarded by some to be more important than elections that are held every year, because the electorate will not get another chance to vote in a local election for four years. In addition, their vote is directly contributing towards who will control their council for the next term, in contrast to a vote in a local authority that elects by thirds, as only a proportion of the council seats will change. Holding elections every year in a district council may devalue the importance of any single election and could also induce voter fatigue. The elections of 1983 and 1987 were held just prior to what turned out to be general elections. It was suggested in the media at the time of these local elections that they were seen by some politicians to be a dry run for the general election. Hence, perhaps more people voted as these elections were given more political significance than usual. The same could be said for 1991 because if the local results had been better for the Conservatives, the general election might have been called in 1991.

Table 8.1: The averages and range in the level of turnout in district wards by year of election (1983-1991).

Year	Mean	Min	Ward	District	Max	Ward	District
1983	46.3	22.1	Queens	Rushmoor	73.8	Flimby	Allerdale
1987	48.5	16.3	Queens	Rushmoor	74.1	Breadsall and Morley	Erewash
					74.1	Wanney	Tynedale
1991	48.1	17.0	Queens	Rushmoor	74.0	Youlgreave	Derbyshire Dales

This overview of the turnout in district wards has shown that an investigation of turnout at the ward level is vital, because there is a great deal of variation in turnout which needs some sort of explanation. The range between the highest and lowest rates of turnout at the ward level was 57.8 percentage points. Only 16.3% of the electorate voted in the Queens ward (Rushmoor) in 1987, while Breadsall and Morley from Erewash and the Wanney ward from Tynedale both had a turnout of 74.1% in the same election. The most striking observation from Table 8.1 is that the Queens ward had the lowest turnout of all wards in each election. The average turnout in the ward over the three elections is 18.5%. Section 8.4 suggests some reasons for the behaviour of this ward.

Before we go on to investigate why turnout varies between wards, we shall begin by examining those wards with the highest and lowest rates of turnout in each election. What districts are the wards from, are there any wards that produce high/low rates of turnout on more than one occasion and if so, can we offer any reasons for their behaviour? These two sections will set the scene and may help to identify wards that may appear later as residuals.

8.3: High turnout wards in the district councils.

In the analysis of London wards we examined the ten wards with the highest rates of turnout in each election. In the metropolitan boroughs, we examined those wards with the five highest turnouts in every election. To produce a similar number of wards as were obtained in these previous chapters, we examined the 20 (and equal twentieth) wards with the highest turnout in the three elections. This analysis was undertaken to identify if there were any wards and boroughs that consistently over-performed in relation to the level of turnout in other wards.

A total of 62 wards are included in Table 8.2. Fourteen districts had more than one of these high turnout wards. The district with the most number of appearances was Derbyshire Dales with seven (11% of the total). Two of these wards each came from the elections of 1983 and 1991, while the district had three high turnout wards in 1987. Tynedale produced the second highest number of wards in Table 8.2 with five (8%) occurrences. All five wards came from the 1987 election. Although some of the wards in this district consistently produce quite high levels of voter participation, the turnout in these five wards in this election was exceptionally high. Finally, Durham and Newark and Sherwood each produced four (6%) of the high turnout wards. This shows that although there are a large number of districts that the high turnout wards can come from, four districts manage to produce nearly a third of the total. The list of district wards with high rates of turnout shows that a ward can appear more than once in the table. No ward appears in the top 20 turnout rates in all three elections, but there are ten wards that appear in two out of three elections. These wards are Youlgreave, Winster and South Darley and Calver from Derbyshire Dales, Gotham (Rushcliffe), Rural North (Corby), Oldbury-on-Severn (Northavon), Danesborough (Milton Keynes), Tintwhistle (High Peak), Croxdale (Durham) and Cradley (Malvern Hills). This finding indicates that once a ward has a high level of turnout, it is likely that it will produce a similarly high level of turnout in another election.

There are many wards in Table 8.2 which appear on one occasion only. The ward at the top of the table, Breadsall and Morley from Erewash, is one such example. This ward produced a turnout of 74.1% in 1987. This is not a one-off high level of turnout, because in 1983 the ward had a turnout of 63.4% and in 1991, 65% of the electorate turned out to vote. What reasons can be offered to explain the high turnout in this ward? The ward is composed of two small villages, Breadsall with an electorate of about 650 and Morley with an electorate of about 300. The local council described the ward as being rural and although one farm is the main employer in the ward, according to the 1991 census only 3% of the population in the ward are employed in agriculture. The ward seems to be a relatively prosperous electoral unit as 83% of households are home owners and there is less than 4% unemployment. Can any political reasons be suggested to explain the high turnout? The results of the three elections in the ward indicate that it is very safe for the Conservatives. A former councillor explained that all political parties and the Conservatives especially, were quite active in the area in 1987. Despite its small size, Morley used to have its own Conservative party branch in 1987, but it has since closed. Our respondent believed that the turnout was especially high in the ward in 1987 because the Conservative candidate standing for election for the first time was from Breadsall, the larger of the two villages. Hence, it was easier for him to get more people out to vote than the previous councillor who came from Morley.

Table 8.2 not only provides the wards with the top 20 turnout rates in each election, but for each ward it also gives information on the winning party and a figure for previous marginality. Of the 62 wards in total, 26 were won by the Conservatives, 17 were won by the Liberal Democrats, Independent candidates won 14 wards and finally, the Labour party came first in five wards. Once again, we have detected a pattern of high levels of turnout not occurring in wards won by Labour. There are 48 wards in Table 8.2 that have a figure for previous marginality, fourteen wards were uncontested in the previous election. Of these high turnout wards, fifteen had a marginality of less than ten percentage points at the last election. Overall, the average marginality figure was 22.1%, compared with figures of

15.5% and 12.9% for London and the metropolitan wards respectively. This suggests that marginality may not be such an influential variable in this particular type of local authority.

Table 8.2: List of district wards that appeared in the top 20 ward turnout rates in the elections of 1983, 1987 and 1991.

Ward (District)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Breadsall and Morley (Erewash)	1987	74.1	Conservative	60.13
Wanney (Tynedale)	1987	74.1	Lib Dems	
Youlgreave (D.Dales)	1991	74.0	Independent	45.27
Flimby (Allerdale)	1983	73.8	Independent	39.71
Gotham (Rushcliffe)	1991	72.7	Lib Dems	41.59
Rural North (Corby)	1987	72.6	Labour	7.09
Wylam (Tynedale)	1987	72.0	Independent	21.44
Wimblington (Fenland)	1991	71.6	Independent	
Rural North (Corby)	1983	71.5	Labour	15.53
Gilesgate (Tynedale)	1987	71.5	Conservative	24.20
Winster and South Darley (D.Dales)	1991	71.5	Lib Dems	24.23
Oldbury on Severn (Northavon)	1991	71.3	Conservative	8.55
Plycombe (Mendip)	1991	71.0	Conservative	12.18
Cannington and Combwich (Sedgemoor)	1983	70.5	Conservative	8.85
Ovingham (Tynedale)	1987	70.4	Lib Dems	32.24
Brassington and Parwich (D.Dales)	1987	70.3	Conservative	
Waddington (Ribble Valley)	1991	70.2	Conservative	
Hatherleigh (West Devon)	1991	70.2	Independent	
Danesborough (Milton Keynes)	1987	70.1	Independent	74.70
Pluckley (Ashford)	1987	70.0	Lib Dems	12.13
Tintwhistle (High Peak)	1987	70.0	Conservative	23.26
Hawkesbury (Northavon)	1987	70.0	Conservative	45.11
Marazion (Penwith)	1991	70.0	Conservative	6.01
Harbledown (Canterbury)	1991	69.9	Lib Dems	1.67
Sabden (Ribble Valley)	1991	69.9	Lib Dems	
Croxdale (Durham)	1983	69.8	Labour	19.07
Croxdale (Durham)	1987	69.8	Labour	29.94
Wickham Bishops (Maldon)	1991	69.7	Independent	1.05
Cradley (Malvern Hills)	1987	69.6	Lib Dems	12.97
Chesters (Tynedale)	1987	69.5	Lib Dems	26.91
Winster and South Darley (D.Dales)	1987	69.3	Lib Dems	24.72
Stockbridge (Test Valley)	1987	69.2	Conservative	
Newbiggen West (Wansbeck)	1987	69.2	Lib Dems	5.58
Danesborough (Milton Keynes)	1983	69.1	Conservative	
Tintwhistle (High Peak)	1983	69.0	Conservative	3.34
Turn Hill (South Somerset)	1987	68.8	Conservative	18.87
Eaton (Norwich)	1991	68.8	Conservative	28.57
Axbridge (Sedgemoor)	1991	68.8	Lib Dems	12.84
Caunton (Newark and Sherwood)	1983	68.7	Conservative	0.17
Carrville (Durham)	1991	68.6	Labour	7.46
Framwelgate Moor (Durham)	1991	68.5	Independent	40.34

Table 8.2: cont:

Ward (District)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Kings Cliffe (East Northamptonshire)	1991	68.5	Lib Dems	34.13
Calver (D.Dales)	1987	68.4	Conservative	25.27
Lambourne (Epping Forest)	1987	68.4	Conservative	15.23
Oldbury on Severn (Northavon)	1987	68.4	Conservative	
Colburn (Richmondshire)	1991	68.3	Independent	40.82
Keynsham North (Wansdyke)	1991	68.3	Independent	8.03
Williton (West Somerset)	1991	68.3	Labour	
Cradley (Malvern Hills)	1983	68.2	Conservative	17.54
Castle (Leominster)	1991	68.1	Independent	
Cherry Holme (Beverley)	1983	68.0	Conservative	2.14
Calver (Derbyshire Dales)	1983	67.8	Conservative	2.24
Ingatestone and Fryerning (Brentwood)	1983	67.7	Lib Dems	34.38
Roseland (Carrick)	1983	67.4	Independent	
Hatfield (Leominster)	1983	67.2	Independent	
Farndon (Newark and Sherwood)	1983	67.0	Conservative	33.86
Gotham (Rushcliffe)	1983	66.8	Lib Dems	
St. Johns (High Peak)	1983	66.6	Conservative	64.00
Dover Beck (Newark and Sherwood)	1983	66.6	Conservative	32.91
Southwell East (Newark and Sherwood)	1983	66.6	Lib Dems	6.53
Arbury (North Hertfordshire)	1983	66.5	Conservative	5.73
Youlgreave (Derbyshire Dales)	1983	66.4	Independent	23.26

In the final part of the analysis into the high turnout wards we focus upon two wards to see whether by examining their political, structural and socio-economic make-up, we can offer any explanation for their level of turnout. Both Rural North (Corby), and Youlgreave from Derbyshire Dales appeared twice in Table 8.2. We decided to use the results of the 1983 election in the wards as our example.

Rural North produces an average turnout rate of nearly 72% in the three elections in the data-set. This level of voter participation is close to the average turnout found in a general election but is a quite extraordinary figure for a local election. What reasons can be suggested for the behaviour of the electorate in this ward? Rural North is composed of two small villages, Gretton and Rockingham, with a combined electorate in 1983 of just 995. The ward's socio-economic composition is illustrated in Table 8.3. The figures from the 1981 census indicate that the ward is very close to the average census figures for all the district wards in most respects. The only two variables in the ward that differ quite widely

to the average census figures for the district wards are the greater proportion of households which have access to a car and a higher level of unemployment. The NOCAR variable can be used as a surrogate of income. Generally, this means that the lower the measure for this variable the more wealthy an area. Rural North is a rural ward, however, so a car is much more of a necessity than in other wards and may not indicate levels of income. The level of unemployment is more than twice the average figure for the districts. From our analysis in Chapter 5, we would have expected to find a low level of unemployment in a high turnout ward but this was not the case in Rural North.

Can anything be determined from the result of the elections to the Rural North ward to explain the high level of turnout? In 1983, Labour won the ward election from the Alliance by less than eight percentage points. This proved to be a closer contest than the previous election, where Labour won by fifteen percentage points. In 1987, only three percentage points divided Labour from the Alliance but Labour continued their hold on the ward. Finally, in 1991 the Liberal Democrats won the ward election. This brief resumé of the political history of the ward illustrates that Rural North is closely fought by the three main parties and this may be one of the determining factors of the high turnout. The council on the other hand is safe for Labour with seventeen being their lowest majority during this period.

Youlgreave (Derbyshire Dales) is the other high turnout ward in Table 8.3. It has an average turnout of nearly 70% over the three elections. From a political perspective, the ward is relatively safe for an Independent candidate. The ward was won by an Independent in all three elections. Incidentally, the Independent councillor stood for the Labour party at the next election in 1995 and lost the ward. Like Rural North, the socio-economic composition of the electorate in the ward conforms quite closely to the average figures from the census. It seems, therefore, that we can deduce very little from the figures at our disposal to explain why turnout should be so high. There must be other factors at work which do not lend themselves easily to measurement. A representative from the

local council reports that the ward is composed of a small village, where people either work locally or compute to nearby Matlock. There are only 1,315 electors in the ward which is small enough for some sort of 'community' to exist. Another local source reports that people generally stay in the village throughout their lives as there are lots of generations of the same families still living there. This low level of migration could be a possible determinant of such high levels of voter participation in the area. The district of Derbyshire Dales is the focus of a small case-study in Chapter 9.

Table 8.3: The socio-economic make-up of two high turnout wards in the district councils compared to the average census figures for the data-set and the average census figures for the high turnout wards*.

Variable	Census 1981	Mean census figures for the high turnout wards	Rural North 1983	Youlgreave 1983
COUNCIL	23.7	17.6	21.1	21.0
MANUAL	49.2	47.6	54.0	57.1
MANUF	35.8	35.4	32.0	50.8
NCWP	2.4	2.6	0.6	0.7
NOCAR	30.0	21.5	18.3	33.8
OWNOCC	61.7	64.2	61.7	58.1
PROFMAN	19.0	23.0	22.0	19.1
SELFEMP	12.7	13.8	11.6	18.7
SKILLED	25.3	21.5	30.0	36.5
UNEMP	7.7	5.8	15.7	8.9

*(Only 20 out of the 62 high turnout wards are included in the mean census figures for the high turnout wards, as these are the wards that had their high rates of turnout in the 1983 election. Hence, we are comparing the values for the socio-economic variables from the 1981 census only).

8.4: Low turnout wards in the district councils.

We used the same procedure for examining the low turnout wards as we did for the high turnout wards by selecting those 20 wards with the lowest turnout in each election. Table 8.4 shows the 60 wards in ascending order of their turnout rates. Our results show that there are some districts which make more than one appearance in the table. Middlesbrough produces the most number of wards with ten (17% of the total), Hartlepool

has six low turnout wards (10%) and Stoke-on-Trent has four wards (7%) in Table 8.4. These three districts produce a third of the low turnout wards. Not only do some districts produce a number of low turnout wards, but a few wards appear more than once. The Queens ward (Rushmoor) and Stanhope (Ashford) both appeared in the bottom 20 turnout rates in every election. There were eight wards in total that appeared on two occasions. These wards were Thorntree, Berwick Hills, Grove Hill and Beechwood from Middlesbrough, Over Two (Vale Royal), Dyke House (Hartlepool), Walderslade (Rochester-upon-Medway) and Osmaston (Derby). The number of wards with more than one appearance in Table 8.4 indicates that once a ward has a low level of turnout, it can often repeat this behaviour in another election.

The previous two chapters found that the Labour party came first in the majority of low turnout wards. Table 8.4 gives the party label of the candidate that came first and shows that this pattern of behaviour is continued in the districts. 45 of the 60 low turnout wards were won by Labour, twelve wards were won by the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats came first in three wards. The final column in Table 8.4 contains the figures for ward marginality. Out of the 59 wards that have a 'margin' figure, eleven have a marginality of less than ten percentage points. The average previous marginality figure for all the low turnout wards was 33.5%. This is eleven percentage points higher than the mean figure produced for the high turnout wards in section 8.3. We can imply from these results that when a ward has a low level of turnout, the ward is likely to be safe for Labour.

Table 8.4: List of district wards that appeared in the bottom 20 ward turnout rates in the elections of 1983, 1987 and 1991.

Ward (District)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Queens (Rushmoor)	1987	16.3	Conservative	15.17
Queens (Rushmoor)	1991	17.0	Conservative	40.77
Thorntree (Middlesbrough)	1987	21.7	Labour	63.45
Queens (Rushmoor)	1983	22.1	Conservative	17.59
Ashley Green and Latimer (Chiltern)	1991	22.1	Conservative	32.31

Table 8.4: cont:

Ward (District)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Stanhope (Ashford)	1991	24.1	Labour	5.11
Woodside (The Wrekin)	1991	24.4	Labour	34.62
Hill (Daventry)	1991	24.6	Labour	6.71
Berwick Hills (Middlesbrough)	1983	24.8	Labour	59.60
Grove Hill (Middlesbrough)	1987	25.0	Labour	31.47
Grove Hill (Middlesbrough)	1983	25.3	Labour	33.39
Ethelbert (Thanet)	1991	25.4	Conservative	4.23
Burtonwood (Warrington)	1991	25.7	Labour	30.78
Stanhope (Ashford)	1983	26.3	Labour	38.20
Battins (Havant)	1983	26.4	Labour	16.31
Fens (Hartlepool)	1983	26.5	Labour	11.62
Over Two (Vale Royal)	1983	26.6	Labour	38.21
Pallister (Middlesbrough)	1983	26.7	Labour	67.55
Shireland (North East Derbyshire)	1983	26.8	Labour	19.70
Thorntree (Middlesbrough)	1991	26.8	Labour	71.15
Eccleston and Heskin (Chorley)	1987	26.9	Conservative	16.72
Grange (Stockton-on-Tees)	1983	27.0	Labour	77.07
Dyke House (Hartlepool)	1983	27.3	Labour	37.43
Beechwood (Middlesbrough)	1983	27.4	Labour	37.03
Paddock Wood (Tunbridge Wells)	1983	27.4	Conservative	2.80
Dalton South (Barrow-in-Furness)	1983	27.5	Conservative	5.39
Gravel (Vale Royal)	1983	27.5	Labour	0.60
Earlesfield (South Kesteven)	1983	27.7	Labour	22.42
Stranton (Hartlepool)	1983	27.8	Labour	30.74
Owton (Hartlepool)	1991	27.8	Labour	39.60
Brookhouse (Stoke-on-Trent)	1991	28.0	Labour	48.30
Killamarsh (North East Derbyshire)	1983	28.1	Labour	33.90
Walderslade (Rochester-upon-Medway)	1991	28.1	Conservative	18.04
Mandeville (Aylesbury Vale)	1983	28.3	Lib Dems	4.80
Osmaston (Derby)	1983	28.3	Labour	39.56
Colyton (Easy Devon)	1991	28.7	Conservative	
Brumby West (Scunthorpe)	1991	28.8	Labour	15.65
Dyke House (Hartlepool)	1987	29.0	Labour	47.24
Beechwood (Middlesbrough)	1987	29.0	Labour	50.82
Brookhouse (Stoke-on-Trent)	1987	29.0	Labour	70.62
Pier (Thanet)	1991	29.0	Labour	3.54
Luton (Rochester-upon-Medway)	1987	29.1	Labour	16.02
Walderslade (Rochester-upon-Medway)	1987	29.2	Conservative	36.42
Wormley and Turnford (Broxbourne)	1991	29.2	Conservative	44.58
Dyke House (Hartlepool)	1991	29.3	Labour	32.70
Over Two (Vale Royal)	1987	29.4	Labour	37.90
Victoria (Great Grimsby)	1991	29.4	Labour	55.41
Sutton (North East Derbyshire)	1987	29.6	Labour	9.60
Brookside (The Wrekin)	1991	29.6	Labour	12.98
Shadworth (Blackburn)	1987	29.9	Labour	56.49
Higher Croft (Blackburn)	1991	30.0	Labour	49.41
Osmaston (Derby)	1987	30.1	Labour	54.97
Hainton (Great Grimsby)	1991	30.3	Labour	17.82
Berwick Hills (Middlesbrough)	1987	30.4	Labour	68.72
Hythe (Runneymede)	1987	30.4	Labour	7.70
Burslem Central (Stoke-on-Trent)	1987	30.4	Labour	22.07

Table 8.4: cont:

Ward (District)	Year	Turnout	Winner	Margin
Cirencester Breeches (Cotswold)	1987	30.6	Lib Dems	1.61
Stanhope (Ashford)	1987	30.7	Lib Dems	77.78
Park End (Middlesbrough)	1987	30.8	Labour	65.16
Chell (Stoke-on-Trent)	1987	30.8	Labour	46.56

We have illustrated in the previous two chapters that a number of wards can appear more than once as a low turnout ward. What reasons can be given to explain the turnout in a ward that consistently produces a low turnout? We decided to concentrate on two wards to probe this issue in more detail. These wards were the Queens ward from Rushmoor that had a turnout in the bottom 20 wards in every election and the Thorntree ward from Middlesbrough that appeared as a low turnout ward on two occasions. This latter ward was chosen as an example because a number of wards from Middlesbrough appeared twice in Table 8.4.

Firstly, is there something special about the Queens ward that can help to explain why people vote in such small proportions? An analysis of the political contests showed that the ward is safe for the Conservatives. The party always receive more than 50% of the vote in the ward and have a lead in all three elections over the second placed party of at least fifteen percentage points. Perhaps the relative safeness of the ward may be a factor behind the low level of turnout? The analysis of the socio-economic make-up of the ward produces some surprising results. Table 8.5 shows that there are only 2.4% of households which are council tenants and 18.5% are home owners. This means that there are a very high proportion of households in rented property. Secondly, in each occupational category there are smaller proportions of people in the Queens ward than in the average census figures.

The likely explanation for the low turnout in Queens is because the ward encompasses the married quarters of the local army base in Aldershot. The army have been made aware of their voting rights by the local electoral registration office, but a council official reports that they are very apathetic. Our respondent continues by noting that it is not just the local elections where the electorate decide not to participate in great numbers, because the turnout in general elections is also much lower in this ward compared to other wards in the district. Service personnel face a number of problems that make it especially difficult for them to cast their vote. Firstly, they may be away from home on the day of the election and may not have had enough time to apply for a postal or proxy vote. Another problem is that a proxy is normally a member of your family, and it is unlikely that a potential voters family would live in the locality. In addition to these factors, the location of the service accommodation in one area separated from the civilian population may mean that the army do not feel part of the locality, only the camp where they live. A final reason for the low level of turnout is that the service personnel in the Queens ward are under army and not local jurisdiction, so why should they take part in a contest that is seen to be 'out of bounds'.

The other low turnout ward in Table 8.5 is the Thorntree ward from Middlesborough. What factors can be provided to explain the behaviour of this ward? The local electoral registration office believed that there are two main reasons for the low turnout. The first is the lack of political competition in the ward as the ward is dominated by the Labour party. One Labour councillor has represented the ward for more than 35 years. The share of the vote for the Labour candidates in the 1987 ward election was more than 85%. Although there are three councillors for this ward, Labour's strong position means that only 'paper candidates' are put forward in opposition. A second explanatory factor for the poor level of voter participation is the socio-economic make-up of the ward. The ward is mainly composed of two council estates which explains the COUNCIL variable having a value of 76.3% in Table 8.5. Two surrogate indicators of low income in the ward are the fact that over three-quarters of households have no access to a car, and the unemployment rate is

nearly four times the average for the district wards. These census variables had negative correlations with turnout at the local authority level in the districts, we expect, therefore, that a ward with high levels of council housing and unemployment will have low levels of turnout. Given its political complexion and social composition, the low turnout in Thorntree may not be unexpected.

Table 8.5: The socio-economic make-up of two low turnout wards in the district councils compared to the average census figures for the data-set and the average census figures for the low turnout wards*.

Variable	Census 1991	Mean census figures for the low turnout wards	Queens 1991	Thorntree 1987
COUNCIL	15.6	35.6	2.4	76.3
MANUAL	33.7	40.0	16.0	37.3
MANUF	17.2	19.9	3.8	20.9
NCWP	1.7	2.0	2.2	0.8
NOCAR	24.3	44.2	21.3	76.6
OWNOCC	72.3	51.1	18.5	20.3
PROFMAN	22.8	11.1	5.5	2.6
SELFEMP	15.5	8.9	0.8	1.6
SKILLED	22.2	23.4	7.7	14.9
UNEMP	4.3	9.4	2.9	16.6

*(Only 40 out of the 60 low turnout wards are included in the mean census figures for the low turnout wards, as these are the wards that had their low rates of turnout in the 1987 and 1991 elections. Hence, we are comparing the values for the socio-economic variables from the 1991 census only).

8.5: The 'highs and lows' of ward turnout within the district councils.

The previous two sections have shown that there are wards that consistently appear at either the top end or at the bottom of the turnout league. When these two pieces of analysis are taken together, it demonstrates that there is a wide range in rates of voter participation between wards in different districts over time. This section will address whether there is any significant variation in ward turnout within the same district. We would expect the range in turnout rates within districts to be small compared to the variation that exists when we compare turnout in wards across districts. Our hypothesis is

that if a ward has a high turnout, then it is unlikely that another ward in the same district will have a very low turnout.

How much variation in turnout levels is there within a district council? The first method of answering this question is to compare the wards that appeared in Tables 8.2 and 8.4 to see if there are any districts that have both a high and a low turnout ward. The results of this investigation shows that one district, Ashford, has a ward (Pluckley) that appears in the top 20 turnout wards in 1987 with a turnout of 70% and another ward (Stanhope) that appears in the bottom 20 turnout wards with a turnout of 30.7% in the same election. This gives a range of 39.3 percentage points between the two wards from the same district in the same election.

Table 8.6 shows the highest and lowest ward turnout within every district council in our data-set, along with the average rate of turnout for each district. These figures show that the average turnout in some districts can remain at a consistent level over time. In Rossendale, for example, the turnout in the council is always above 50% and only deviates five percentage points from the lowest turnout of 51.3% in 1991 to the high of 56.3% in 1987. Rossendale was found to be a high turnout district in Chapter 4. This high level of voter participation is displayed across all wards, as the difference between the wards with the highest and lowest turnout in a election is always less than ten percentage points. The lowest ward turnout in Rossendale is 46.4% which is comfortably higher than the often quoted figure of 40% turnout in local elections. It is likely, therefore, that this district will, for whatever reason, invariably produce a high rate of turnout.

Table 8.6: Deviation of turnout at the ward level within the district councils (about here).

The district that had the most consistent average turnout over the three elections was Bracknell whose turnout deviated be less than one percentage point between a low of 45.6% in 1983 and a high of 46.2% in 1987. What these average figures hide are the wide

Table 8.6: Deviation of turnout at the ward level within the district councils.

DISTRICT	1983			1987			1991		
	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max
BATH	39.0	47.7	59.3	41.8	54.5	62.7	48.6	56.2	64.9
NORTHAVON	31.9	48.6	61.2	33.9	52.1	70.0	38.6	51.5	67.0
WANSDYKE	29.5	50.1	64.0	32.4	50.8	65.3	31.7	51.1	68.3
WOODSPRING	30.7	42.4	62.3	30.9	43.6	57.2	33.0	48.1	56.3
LUTON	37.2	44.4	49.8	36.4	43.8	50.5	36.1	44.9	52.6
MID BEDFORDSHIRE	29.4	42.2	55.8	30.9	45.7	62.6	35.0	45.9	63.0
SOUTH BEDFORDSHIRE	34.5	45.0	55.5	35.3	49.5	65.8	30.7	45.6	64.1
BRACKNELL	36.9	45.6	58.1	39.2	46.2	58.8	37.2	46.0	53.0
WOKINGHAM	41.0	46.0	55.6	37.6	44.4	54.6	33.9	44.5	52.2
AYLESBURY VALE	25.7	41.4	61.7	33.2	48.0	64.5	37.0	45.3	60.1
CHILTERN	33.4	45.0	61.1	34.5	48.4	63.4	22.1	47.7	66.9
MILTON KEYNES	36.4	49.0	69.1	33.4	49.2	70.1	36.6	47.2	66.0
CAMBRIDGE	40.6	50.8	59.3	33.6	51.0	63.6	34.4	44.4	52.2
FENLAND	30.9	37.9	45.2	32.0	41.7	66.1	30.2	42.9	71.6
HUNTINGDON	29.9	43.1	57.5	37.2	46.3	61.4	34.3	45.2	56.8
PETERBOROUGH	38.5	46.1	56.9	35.3	45.5	55.5	31.8	41.9	51.2
SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE	33.2	46.3	57.7	38.8	48.6	59.4	38.7	47.3	56.1
CHESTER	39.2	48.0	57.7	37.7	52.4	63.6	36.5	51.9	63.8
CONGLETON	33.4	42.3	57.1	36.4	48.6	57.7	43.0	49.7	55.0
CREWE AND NANTWICH	31.7	44.3	59.3	31.6	44.3	56.3	34.2	48.3	57.9
ELLESMERE PORT AND NESTON	38.8	48.8	64.5	38.8	50.8	66.3	35.1	49.0	60.5
MACCLESFIELD	32.4	49.3	58.0	32.3	47.9	63.6	40.5	48.7	56.2
VALE ROYAL	26.6	42.2	61.3	30.9	44.6	61.5	31.5	47.0	65.1
WARRINGTON	38.4	44.7	50.3				25.7	41.2	52.2
HARTLEPOOL	26.5	32.8	44.2	29.0	39.5	56.0	27.8	39.8	52.9
LANGBAURGH	47.3	53.2	62.1	48.3	54.2	62.6	45.0	52.7	59.0
MIDDLESBROUGH	24.8	38.3	51.4	21.7	40.1	54.3	26.8	40.2	58.8
STOCKTON-ON-TEES	27.0	40.1	55.7	33.7	45.1	65.5	32.2	45.4	63.8
CARRICK	40.2	51.5	67.4	38.4	48.1	63.1	40.1	51.5	65.6
NORTH CORNWALL	39.5	55.3	65.2	32.0	45.4	59.6	38.1	50.7	67.0
PENWITH	30.8	43.0	63.2	37.7	50.8	60.6	42.8	52.2	70.0
ALLERDALE	45.7	53.8	73.8	31.7	46.7	60.0	37.0	47.2	57.0
BARROW IN FURNESS	27.5	36.4	45.4	33.5	40.5	48.5	37.6	43.0	51.0
COPELAND	29.6	43.7	64.8	35.5	48.7	65.2	43.0	52.2	64.0
SOUTH LAKELAND	37.0	47.9	59.1	41.5	49.4	54.2	45.8	52.3	61.5
AMBER VALLEY	37.7	47.3	56.9	45.3	57.0	64.9	49.0	56.2	63.0
BOLSOVER	31.7	42.0	63.5	35.0	48.7	64.1	36.6	46.4	65.5
CHESTERFIELD	34.6	48.1	57.0	38.9	49.7	60.3	31.2	46.6	59.8
DERBY	28.3	40.6	48.3	30.1	44.3	54.1	31.8	45.9	56.4
EREWASH	32.8	46.1	63.4	40.1	53.3	74.1	38.1	52.1	65.0
HIGH PEAK	37.9	52.3	69.0	40.3	51.7	70.0	45.9	53.9	63.0
NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE	26.8	43.2	60.6	29.6	44.5	57.9	32.1	42.6	56.7
SOUTH DERBYSHIRE	25.3	43.4	57.8	31.0	51.0	63.6	36.0	50.9	62.6
DERBYSHIRE DALES	29.6	54.1	67.8	44.8	60.8	70.3	34.7	59.2	74.0
EAST DEVON	34.4	46.6	57.7				28.7	58.6	67.8
PLYMOUTH	32.2	42.1	55.5	39.6	48.2	58.5	44.4	51.7	62.8
SOUTH HAMS	31.0	46.8	62.6	32.3	48.7	63.3	40.1	53.3	62.2
WEST DEVON	33.5	43.0	61.1	33.2	44.8	55.1	35.7	51.1	70.2
CHRISTCHURCH	31.2	41.3	47.8	42.9	51.8	58.5	43.4	50.7	59.5
PURBECK	30.4	44.2	49.7	38.7	50.6	57.9	38.0	47.0	56.0
WEYMOUTH AND PORTLAND	35.2	44.0	49.1	39.4	47.8	67.1	40.2	48.7	61.1
CHESTER LE STREET	35.4	48.4	62.5	34.8	47.8	58.7	35.2	44.5	63.0
DARLINGTON	33.2	43.8	57.5	39.6	47.6	59.5	35.9	49.8	59.9
DERWENTSIDE	28.8	42.4	55.7	33.8	43.0	62.7	40.0	47.2	55.9
DURHAM CITY	38.5	49.6	69.8	36.3	51.6	69.8	31.3	51.6	68.6

Table 8.6: cont:

DISTRICT	1983			1987			1991		
	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max
EASTBOURNE	45.4	52.6	56.9	45.1	51.6	58.6	45.0	51.7	56.8
HASTINGS	31.5	39.8	48.9				36.0	42.5	54.0
HOVE	35.5	41.1	47.6	38.7	43.2	47.4	33.8	41.2	47.9
BASILDON	34.0	42.8	49.9	35.9	46.2	58.8	35.9	45.8	56.3
BRAINTREE	29.2	45.2	58.0	34.5	50.3	61.9	36.7	51.2	66.3
BRENTWOOD	42.0	51.2	67.7	45.0	53.7	62.0	44.4	52.3	60.6
CASTLE POINT	33.2	40.3	46.8	35.0	42.8	49.4	36.6	41.2	48.2
EPPING FOREST				38.0	47.1	68.4	35.5	44.9	63.7
HARLOW	40.5	47.3	58.3	39.2	46.5	60.2	41.2	46.8	57.9
MALDON							37.6	50.6	69.7
ROCHFORD	33.6	44.3	57.7	42.8	51.8	58.8	36.3	47.6	62.0
SOUTHEND ON SEA	32.1	41.3	51.0	39.4	45.3	52.3	37.1	43.0	52.2
TENDRING	29.2	41.9	53.5	33.9	46.0	55.9	38.9	47.0	56.0
UTTLESFORD				42.0	54.2	67.1	38.4	50.5	63.2
COTSWOLD	29.5	44.0	61.2	30.6	42.8	57.8	35.6	49.0	59.9
GLOUCESTER	36.7	49.4	59.0	41.6	51.0	58.8	36.2	46.8	54.3
BASINGSTOKE AND DEANE	41.1	50.8	61.9	32.5	50.7	67.4	36.6	47.4	60.4
EAST HAMPSHIRE	33.2	47.3	63.6	37.9	52.7	66.0	34.1	50.4	59.9
EASTLEIGH	43.3	50.2	55.8	44.5	53.0	61.9	43.1	49.4	57.6
FAREHAM	36.6	42.9	52.1	42.5	50.1	57.0	37.5	46.2	54.1
GOSPORT	40.4	46.1	52.5	33.5	48.0	64.0	35.3	46.2	57.1
HART	34.4	42.7	50.3	37.1	44.6	54.6	32.7	38.9	52.0
HAVANT	26.4	38.7	53.9	32.9	41.9	54.3	33.1	41.7	54.2
NEW FOREST	32.6	43.2	52.0	30.4	42.1	57.1	32.0	47.2	60.1
RUSHMOOR	22.1	42.9	52.6	16.3	44.0	53.4	17.0	40.7	52.2
SOUTHAMPTON	35.3	43.5	49.4	41.4	46.4	52.2	38.0	44.8	52.3
TEST VALLEY	27.3	39.9	53.1	36.1	53.3	69.2	35.0	48.1	63.0
WINCHESTER	34.0	50.1	62.5				42.0	56.5	67.9
BROMSGROVE	33.3	44.3	59.3	35.0	47.1	55.0	41.0	47.6	57.4
HEREFORD	33.7	39.3	51.5	31.8	40.0	51.9	32.4	42.3	51.3
LEOMINSTER	48.2	52.8	67.2	44.0	52.0	57.5	43.3	53.3	68.1
MALVERN HILLS	31.7	44.5	68.2	39.8	51.8	69.6	36.5	50.6	67.0
SOUTH HEREFORDSHIRE	45.3	53.4	63.3				57.1	59.1	61.0
WORCESTER	32.7	45.3	53.4	32.1	45.2	56.6	32.6	47.1	61.0
WYCHAVON	30.6	44.1	63.1	34.1	44.6	66.7	33.7	47.0	62.0
WYRE FOREST	34.5	48.5	63.9	33.4	48.3	62.1	42.9	50.1	66.9
BROXBOURNE				32.1	42.5	47.9	29.2	38.4	45.0
DACORUM				45.0	55.2	66.8	37.6	48.8	58.8
EAST HERTFORDSHIRE				35.8	49.9	59.6	34.0	45.5	53.0
HERTSMERE	36.2	48.4	62.4	34.6	47.6	58.0	32.0	45.6	53.3
NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE	44.4	56.8	66.5	47.0	58.3	67.0	42.5	52.6	63.4
ST. ALBANS				44.4	55.4	62.4	41.2	50.0	57.7
STEVENAGE				38.7	49.2	56.3	33.6	42.6	51.6
THREE RIVERS				39.1	52.7	63.4	32.0	51.4	67.0
WATFORD				37.8	48.6	61.0	34.2	43.4	53.6
WELWYN HATFIELD							40.5	50.2	60.6
BEVERLEY	38.4	47.8	68.0	44.6	48.6	56.4	39.4	51.4	64.7
BOOTHFERRY	35.5	48.1	66.0	36.0	47.3	65.5	34.3	45.9	60.9
CLEETHORPES							34.0	43.8	55.7
EAST YORKSHIRE	38.7	45.1	59.8	36.2	47.8	62.0	37.2	45.0	56.8
GLANFORD							34.8	45.3	55.2
GREAT GRIMSBY							29.4	40.6	54.3
HOLDERNESS	30.0	39.8	59.6	33.1	42.3	56.5	36.2	49.7	67.8
SCUNTHORPE							28.8	41.2	55.9
MEDINA				44.1	51.3	57.4	42.0	47.8	55.0

Table 8.6: cont:

DISTRICT	1983			1987			1991		
	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max
SOUTH WIGHT				39.6	51.2	59.0	43.7	51.6	61.1
ASHFORD	26.3	47.4	65.9	30.7	50.0	70.0	24.1	47.7	67.5
CANTERBURY	33.6	46.8	53.8	39.8	49.7	66.2	41.4	51.2	69.9
DARTFORD	41.0	53.3	65.3	39.2	52.9	64.5	40.9	49.6	60.1
DOVER				37.7	52.4	66.1	39.5	52.2	67.1
GILLINGHAM	32.5	42.3	48.3	38.8	43.3	53.6	35.3	40.9	52.0
GRAVESHAM	50.5	53.5	55.1	40.7	51.2	57.6	44.7	53.6	59.2
MAIDSTONE	34.7	48.1	65.5	38.2	48.0	59.1	33.2	44.9	54.4
ROCHESTER UPON MEDWAY				29.1	40.9	52.8	28.1	44.7	62.1
SEVENOAKS	35.4	45.5	57.0	32.6	48.5	59.9	31.3	45.1	58.3
SHEPWAY	33.9	46.7	58.4				34.6	49.3	65.0
SWALE	28.6	44.7	57.8	39.6	48.3	60.4	35.5	45.6	58.7
THANET				37.6	45.3	56.8	25.4	41.5	51.1
TUNBRIDGE WELLS	27.4	43.1	57.5	37.3	46.8	58.8	32.0	43.7	52.0
BLACKBURN	33.4	44.1	58.1	29.9	43.4	58.0	30.0	44.6	55.2
BLACKPOOL	38.8	46.5	54.7	39.4	47.1	54.8	44.9	53.1	60.2
BURNLEY	43.0	43.0	43.0						
CHORLEY	33.1	46.4	59.1	26.9	45.3	53.7	35.8	49.6	60.0
FYLDE	33.0	41.4	48.0	33.8	48.8	63.5	41.9	51.5	61.2
HYNDBURN	33.0	48.2	58.5	43.9	52.5	57.8	35.1	47.7	55.3
LANCASTER	38.5	50.2	61.0	43.7	51.2	62.4	40.6	50.9	59.6
PENDLE	47.0	55.6	63.0	43.0	53.3	65.0	42.3	52.0	61.9
RIBBLE VALLEY	28.3	45.4	60.1	41.2	50.3	58.5	41.8	56.1	70.2
ROSSENDALE	50.8	54.3	59.7	51.2	56.3	59.0	46.4	51.3	56.3
WEST LANCASHIRE	31.4	42.6	58.1	38.6	49.1	66.0	36.4	48.9	59.6
WYRE	41.0	49.3	61.0	37.6	50.2	66.4	40.2	52.9	66.7
MELTON				43.2	47.6	55.6	40.8	50.0	58.8
OADBY AND WIGSTON	37.6	44.9	57.4	42.9	46.9	56.5	41.3	50.8	56.6
RUTLAND	32.5	41.7	50.0	35.9	46.4	58.6	46.5	52.4	62.3
LINCOLN	40.2	46.8	53.9	36.4	46.6	54.3	36.2	45.5	52.2
NORTH KESTEVEN							33.4	47.9	65.9
SOUTH KESTEVEN	27.7	42.8	55.4	35.5	47.7	64.3	30.2	46.0	58.3
WEST LINDSEY	28.6	45.4	59.2	31.2	45.3	61.3	35.2	46.1	61.9
BRECKLAND							36.2	46.2	58.3
BROADLAND							37.0	47.3	54.0
GREAT YARMOUTH	45.6	48.6	51.3	47.5	49.4	51.6	42.9	43.8	44.4
NORTH NORFOLK				37.0	50.6	62.8	40.2	51.1	66.7
NORWICH				40.1	51.6	68.8	37.8	46.2	61.8
SOUTH NORFOLK	33.0	51.7	65.0	45.6	57.6	67.9	43.0	54.9	66.8
CORBY	41.6	54.5	71.5	42.7	53.7	72.6	37.4	45.3	57.8
DAVENTRY				34.5	51.1	61.2	24.6	50.2	65.1
EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE				39.0	53.7	65.5	38.5	53.8	68.5
KETTERING							36.0	46.2	50.0
NORTHAMPTON				31.6	40.7	49.2	33.1	41.7	53.1
SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE							38.2	51.0	62.3
ALNWICK							36.0	46.2	64.0
BERWICK UPON TWEED	39.2	52.0	61.2	35.3	51.3	65.1	51.2	56.0	59.1
BLYTH VALLEY				37.2	46.7	56.3	35.1	44.3	54.7
CASTLE MORPETH				40.7	51.8	59.7	44.2	54.0	63.7
TYNEDALE				32.0	54.9	74.1	39.0	53.6	68.0
CRAVEN	39.3	53.9	62.9	40.3	54.2	67.0	45.8	53.7	62.3
HAMBLETON							32.3	47.2	66.7
RICHMONDSHIRE				36.8	49.6	59.7	26.4	51.3	68.3
SCARBOROUGH	38.0	47.2	56.5	33.3	47.9	59.4	32.8	46.4	59.2
SELBY	34.6	47.7	65.6	32.1	49.2	64.9	34.2	49.9	65.0
YORK	42.0	48.6	55.2	43.8	52.8	59.4	41.5	49.4	60.9

Table 8.6: cont:

DISTRICT	1983			1987			1991		
	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max	Min	Mean	Max
BROXTOWE	43.0	52.7	60.0	43.0	54.2	63.0	42.0	50.9	59.0
GEDLING	41.0	53.1	61.2	44.4	55.7	64.0	39.7	51.7	61.0
NEWARK & SHERWOOD	27.5	55.0	68.7	33.7	51.9	67.5	38.7	53.7	63.7
NOTTINGHAM	32.1	40.6	49.5	39.3	48.9	59.7	33.4	44.8	57.1
RUSHCLIFFE	36.0	53.8	66.6				44.8	56.3	72.7
CHERWELL							35.0	44.8	61.0
OXFORD				36.7	51.1	58.3	33.0	44.0	53.9
VALE OF WHITE HORSE							41.6	52.9	64.4
WEST OXFORDSHIRE				35.7	49.1	63.3	31.0	46.9	63.8
BRIDGNORTH				35.1	50.0	57.0	34.3	49.1	58.4
SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM				43.9	49.0	53.3	39.9	47.8	58.0
SOUTH SHROPSHIRE							37.1	51.5	65.2
THE WREKIN				34.2	45.4	57.4	24.4	42.6	58.5
MENDIP				33.0	51.2	63.0	37.0	54.0	71.0
SEDGEMOOR	29.3	49.6	70.5	40.9	56.6	66.8	37.1	53.0	68.8
WEST SOMERSET				38.4	51.0	58.5	38.1	55.1	68.3
SOUTH SOMERSET				37.8	54.8	68.8	44.0	55.8	65.5
CANNOCK CHASE				34.2	46.6	64.9	37.0	42.9	53.5
EAST STAFFORDSHIRE				36.7	47.5	64.4	40.6	50.0	63.3
LICHFIELD							36.9	50.0	58.4
NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME				36.0	45.0	55.5	36.6	44.1	55.5
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE							36.6	47.6	57.0
STAFFORD				40.5	48.3	59.1	39.7	50.4	58.4
STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS							37.9	47.7	58.1
STOKE ON TRENT				29.0	34.6	41.1	28.0	34.7	42.8
BABERGH							30.8	45.8	62.4
IPSWICH							32.8	41.3	51.7
MID SUFFOLK	38.8	48.0	64.7	36.0	49.8	63.0	38.0	48.7	57.0
ST EDMUNDSBURY							32.4	42.1	59.8
ELMBRIDGE	35.0	47.3	58.5	39.5	51.5	61.9	38.4	48.4	58.2
EPSOM AND EWELL	39.8	45.1	53.9	38.0	43.0	50.6	31.4	40.9	46.9
GUILDFORD				37.9	48.3	57.1	36.7	46.4	58.5
MOLE VALLEY							39.0	51.2	60.3
REIGATE AND BANSTEAD							36.2	42.5	51.6
RUNNYMEDE	33.5	41.2	48.4	30.4	39.5	49.2	31.9	39.8	48.5
SPELTHORNE				34.9	41.9	47.7	37.5	43.2	51.2
SURREY HEATH				35.2	44.3	50.8	34.3	42.0	49.1
TANDRIDGE				44.6	54.6	61.3	45.8	53.1	59.8
WOKING				44.7	52.5	63.4	39.8	47.9	56.8
NORTH WARWICKSHIRE				32.3	49.0	61.6	38.0	48.9	63.5
NUNEATON AND BEDWORTH							38.1	43.6	51.2
RUGBY				37.5	49.7	61.2	37.2	49.1	62.9
STRATFORD ON AVON							45.7	54.5	65.3
ADUR				32.0	47.7	56.5	40.3	46.2	55.1
CHICHESTER							38.9	48.8	67.8
HORSHAM				41.3	49.4	64.8	39.1	49.7	67.2
KENNET				31.5	46.1	59.6	40.6	49.7	67.8
SALISBURY				30.7	46.3	61.8	32.5	51.7	64.9

variations in turnout figures between wards within the district. In the election of 1983 for example, one ward in Bracknell had a turnout of 36.9%, while another ward had a turnout of 58.1%. There is a range of 21.2 percentage points between these figures.

There are a number of districts in Table 8.6 that have very wide ranges of ward turnout in the same election. Table 8.7 shows the top ten cases of the largest range between turnout figures within a district in a single election. Ashford, the district that had both a high and a low turnout ward in 1987, had a range of 39.3 percentage points and so comes in just under the qualifying standard for inclusion in the table. The district does, however, appear in Table 8.7 because of the range in turnout rates between its wards in the elections of 1983 and 1991. Chiltern District Council has the largest difference in turnout rates between wards in a single election.

Table 8.7: The top ten cases of the highest range of turnout at the ward level in a district council election.

District	Year	Mean	Min (%)	Max (%)	Range (%)
Chiltern	1991	47.7	22.1	66.9	44.8
Ashford	1991	47.7	24.1	67.5	43.4
Malvern Hills	1983	43.6	26.0	68.2	42.2
Tynedale	1987	54.9	32.0	74.1	42.1
Fenland	1991	42.9	30.2	71.6	41.4
Newark and Sherwood	1983	55.0	27.5	68.7	41.2
Sedgemoor	1983	49.6	29.3	70.5	41.2
Test Valley	1987	50.9	28.5	69.2	40.7
Daventry	1991	50.2	24.6	65.1	40.5
Ashford	1983	47.4	26.3	65.9	39.6

We have now set the scene of turnout variation in district wards. The next area for examination is to determine which variables can help to explain the variation. Both sets of analysis at the ward level in London and the metropolitan boroughs have indicated that political and structural variables have the potential to be important determinants of turnout. We will now test the same hypotheses at the ward level in the districts.

8.6: Testing the relationship between turnout and single/multi-member wards in the district councils.

Our first hypothesis concerns the relationship between turnout and the number of vacancies in a ward. As in London, we expected to find a negative relationship between these variables - the more vacancies there are in a ward the lower the level of turnout. A ward in the district councils can be represented by between one and three councillors. Table 8.8 shows that there are 1,762 wards which have three vacancies to be filled at election time, this amounts to 18% of the total. 57% of wards in the districts are single-member.

The results in Table 8.8 show that turnout is higher in single-member wards than in multi-member wards in every election. Within the multi-member wards, turnout is always higher when a ward is represented by two and not three councillors. On average, turnout is four percentage points higher in single-member wards than it is in multi-member wards. This is a similar finding to that of a five percentage point difference found between these types of wards in London.

Table 8.8: The level of turnout according to single- or multi- member wards in the district councils.

	Vacs=1	Vacs=2	Vacs=3
1983	48.0 (1417)	43.7 (605)	42.0 (461)
1987	50.3 (1977)	46.6 (894)	44.8 (597)
1991	48.7 (2339)	47.5 (1035)	46.9 (704)
Mean	49.0 (5733)	45.9 (2534)	44.6 (1762)

8.7: Testing the relationship between turnout and size of ward electorates in the district councils.

The analysis of the average size of ward electorates at the local authority level in the districts, found an inverse relationship between this variable and turnout. The analysis of ward electorates using the real figures, not averages, has shown a weak relationship with turnout in London and seemingly no relationship with turnout in the metropolitan wards. The size of the electorate is more likely to be influential in the districts, because wards in this type of local authority are much smaller than they are in London and the metropolitan boroughs.

Table 8.9 shows that there does seem to be a relationship between these two variables. In every election in our data-set, the level of turnout is always higher in the smallest sized electorate grouping than it is in larger sized electorates. If we compare the average levels of turnout when the size of the electorate in district wards are at their extreme ('Less than 1,200' versus 'More than 7,500'), the participation rate is more than ten percentage points higher in the wards that have the smaller sized electorates. It is impossible to assert as this stage of analysis that there is definitely a relationship between the size of ward electorates and turnout, but this bivariate examination does indicates that size seems to be a potentially important variable.

We mentioned in this chapter's introduction that there is a very wide range between the sizes of electorate across district wards. As a point of interest, it was decided to examine the turnout rates of the smallest and the largest sized wards over time. The average turnout of the ward with the smallest electorate, Chenies (Chiltern) was 57.5% over two elections. There was no ward contest in 1991 as the Conservative candidate was unopposed. This contrasts with the turnout in the largest sized ward, Nene Valley from Northampton, that had an average turnout of 39.8% over the three elections. Incidentally, this pattern of a high turnout in the smallest sized ward and a low turnout in the biggest sized ward

continued to an even greater degree in 1995 when Chenies had a turnout of 77% while only 28% of the electorate voted in Nene Valley.

Table 8.9: The level of turnout according to the size of the electorate in district wards.

	Less than 1,200	1,200 -1,800	1,801 -3,000	3,001 -4,500	4,501 -7,500	More than 7,500
1983	54.1 (156)	50.8 (398)	46.1 (497)	43.9 (748)	43.2 (547)	42.7 (137)
1987	54.6 (233)	53.0 (558)	48.8 (742)	46.8 (978)	45.8 (797)	44.1 (160)
1991	54.3 (276)	51.6 (682)	48.9 (899)	46.8 (1152)	45.2 (906)	43.6 (164)
Mean	54.3 (665)	51.8 (1024)	47.9 (2138)	45.8 (2878)	44.7 (2250)	43.5 (461)

Within this section of examining the importance of size in relation to the level of turnout, the next variable to investigate is the effect on turnout according to the elector:councillor ratio (CRATIO). This analysis was carried out in two stages, examining the influence of CRATIO in single-member wards and then in multi-member wards. We already know from section 8.6 that turnout is higher in single-member wards than in multi-member wards, while the results in Table 8.9 indicate that turnout is higher in wards which have small electorates. From this we can suggest that the level of turnout will be at its highest in small single-member wards. The results for the single-member wards in Table 8.10 show that on average, turnout is higher when CRATIO is less than 1,200 than in any other category. For example, in the 661 single-member wards with a CRATIO of less than 1,200, the average level of turnout is 54.4%. This is over eight percentage points higher than the turnout in wards where the value for CRATIO is more than 2,200.

Table 8.10: The level of turnout according to the elector:councillor ratio in single-member wards in the district councils.

	Less than 1,200	1,200 -1,400	1,401 -1,600	1,601 -2,200	More than 2,200
1983	54.2 (154)	51.4 (161)	51.8 (139)	49.4 (196)	45.0 (767)
1987	54.7 (232)	53.8 (206)	53.4 (190)	42.1 (326)	47.4 (1023)
1991	54.3 (275)	51.6 (234)	52.2 (231)	50.4 (408)	45.6 (1191)
Mean	54.4 (661)	52.3 (601)	52.5 (560)	47.3 (930)	46.0 (2981)

How important is the elector:councillor ratio as a determinant of turnout in multi-member wards? The figures in Table 8.11 show that as expected, the average level of turnout falls as the values for the CRATIO increase. It does not, however, seem to be a very strong relationship as the average turnout figures vary by less than two percentage points between the 'Less than 1,200' and the 'More than 2,200' categories. When the results in Tables 8.10 and 8.11 are compared, we can see that turnout is much higher in single-member wards in each size category. For example, in single-member wards that have a councillor representing between 1,401-1,600 electors, the average turnout is 52.5%. In multi-member wards with the same elector:councillor ratio, the average turnout is 45.8%. We can conclude from these results that the elector:councillor ratio is not a particularly strong determinant of turnout in multi-member wards, but it does seem to be an important variable in explaining the higher turnout in single-member wards. Of course, turnout may not be higher in single-member wards because of the low CRATIO, but may just be the result of the small electorate in the ward. It is significant to note that it is only in the districts where the size of the electorate in a ward and the elector:councillor ratio seems to have some influence on the level of turnout.

Table 8.11: The level of turnout according to the elector:councillor ratio in multi-member wards in the district councils.

	Less than 1,200	1,200 -1,400	1,401 -1,600	1,601 -2,200	More than 2,200
1983	43.1 (153)	43.0 (250)	43.7 (216)	42.5 (253)	42.9 (193)
1987	46.2 (232)	46.2 (265)	46.2 (287)	46.0 (476)	44.7 (231)
1991	49.0 (276)	48.3 (339)	47.6 (356)	46.4 (543)	45.1 (225)
Mean	46.1 (661)	45.8 (854)	45.8 (859)	45.0 (1272)	44.2 (649)

8.8: Testing the relationship between turnout and party competition in district wards.

The first political variable to test was the relationship between the number of major parties in a ward election and the level of turnout. It was hypothesised that the more major parties that contest a ward, the greater the level of turnout in that election. This relationship was confirmed for the wards in both London and the metropolitan boroughs, but can this pattern also be detected in the districts?

Before we attempt to test our hypothesis, we should acknowledge the different intensities of party competition across local government. We found that just over 2% of wards in London had only one major party competing while in the metropolitan wards this figure was only 1%. In the districts, 11% of wards had one major party competing. This difference in political competition between the London and metropolitan boroughs and the districts needs some explanation. In the districts, the three major parties can often struggle to find candidates to stand for election, especially in areas where they would have little or no chance of winning a ward. The second reason for the difference in political competition is that there are more candidates standing as Independents and/or belonging to 'other' parties in the districts than there are in London and the metropolitan wards. Historically, the districts have been slower to embrace party politics than the more urban

London and metropolitan areas. These factors help to explain why only 54% of district wards involve all three major parties.

Table 8.12 shows that the turnout rates are pretty similar according to the different values for the variable, MAJOR. The average turnout is highest when three major parties are competing in a ward, but this figure is less than one percentage point higher than the average turnout in wards where only one major party competes. In London, the difference in turnout rates between ward contests which involved one major party competing and those that had three major parties was over ten percentage points, in the metropolitan wards the figure was eight percentage points. These results suggest that, unlike London and the metropolitan wards, the level of turnout is not dramatically affected by the number of major parties competing in a district ward. Perhaps, the appeal of the three national major parties may not be as strong here as elsewhere where the contests are fought more on party political lines. There may also be more voting as habit and 'civic' voting in district wards.

Table 8.12: The level of turnout according to the number of major parties in district ward elections.

	Major=1	Major=2	Major=3
1983	46.3 (308)	45.3 (833)	46.1 (1289)
1987	46.5 (315)	48.3 (1052)	48.8 (2045)
1991	48.2 (450)	47.7 (1659)	48.3 (1883)
Mean	47.0 (1073)	46.4 (3544)	47.7 (5217)

Another measure of party competition is the closeness of the contest that can be measured by the party share of the vote. We investigated whether there was a relationship between turnout and when a major party receives more than 50% of the vote. Our hypothesis is that there will be a lower level of turnout when a political party is extremely dominant in an election, defined as when one party has more than 80% of the vote, than the level of

turnout when the share of the vote is between 50-60%. The reasoning for this proposal is that the higher a party's proportion of the popular vote, the safer the seat. Hence, less people will bother to vote as they do not see their participation as being valuable in this ward election.

This hypothesis for the Labour party share of the vote was confirmed in London and the metropolitan wards, but in the districts the results in Table 8.13 indicate that no such pattern is easily identifiable. The turnout when the Labour share of the vote is between 50-60% is higher in each election than in all the other categories, but the rate of turnout does not fall as the share of the vote for Labour increases. In fact, there is a higher average turnout in the 'More than 80%' grouping than in the '60.1-70%' and the '70.1-80%' categories. This means that when Labour receives more than 80% of the vote in a ward, although the party are more than 60% ahead of the second placed party, the turnout is slightly higher than in contests where the election is not so close, i.e. when they are at least 20% ahead (60% of the vote to the 40% of the opposition) and 40% ahead of the second placed party (70% of the vote to the 30% of the opposition). We should note, however, that there are not many wards in the districts where Labour receive more then 80% of the vote, as a result we should be careful of making any conclusions from the figures.

Table 8.13: The level of turnout according to the Labour party share of the vote in district wards.

	50-60%	60.1-70%	70.1-80%	More than 80%
1983	43.4 (193)	39.5 (118)	38.6 (54)	41.0 (9)
1987	44.4 (250)	41.4 (134)	42.7 (52)	42.0 (11)
1991	45.0 (345)	42.7 (271)	40.7 (133)	41.0 (41)
Mean	44.3 (788)	41.2 (523)	40.4 (239)	41.3 (61)

The relationship between the Conservative share of the vote and the level of turnout was investigated next. The results in Table 8.14 show that as with the metropolitan wards

(Table 7.11), there does not seem to be a relationship between the two variables. There is less than three percentage points difference between the average turnout figures for the four categories. The highest average turnout figure is produced when the Conservative share of the vote is at its highest at 80% or more. So, even in wards where the Conservatives are very dominant, people still turn out to vote in the same proportions as they do when the Conservatives are not so popular. By comparing the figures in Tables 8.13 and 8.14, we can see that the turnout in wards where the Conservatives receive more than 50% of the vote, is on average, more than seven percentage points higher than the turnout levels when the Labour party have been similarly successful. A similar relationship was found in the wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs. We can infer from this that there is a tendency for low levels of turnout when Labour are particularly strong in a ward election.

Table 8.14: The level of turnout according to the Conservative party share of the vote in district wards.

	50-60%	60.1-70%	70.1-80%	More than 80%
1983	47.6 (345)	46.2 (292)	48.7 (173)	49.6 (64)
1987	50.0 (553)	50.7 (385)	50.1 (146)	50.7 (60)
1991	49.2 (594)	48.1 (354)	49.5 (149)	51.5 (26)
Mean	48.9 (1492)	48.3 (1031)	49.4 (468)	50.8 (150)

The final major party to analyse with regard to their level of support and the resulting turnout are the Liberal Democrats. Table 8.15 shows that the relationship between the Liberal Democrat share of the vote and turnout is similar to the findings for the two other major parties. The average turnout rates only vary by just over three percentage points, with the highest turnout coming from the category containing the wards where the Liberal Democrats are at their strongest. What is most noticeable from the figures in Table 8.15 is that the average level of turnout is very high when the share of the vote for the Liberal Democrats is more than 50%. This average rate of turnout is similar to the figures

received when the Conservatives poll more than 50% of the vote. This means that, on average, the turnout is more than seven percentage points higher in wards where the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are strong than the wards where Labour receive the same level of support. It is not surprising to find high rates of turnout in wards where the Liberal Democrats are strong, because as we have previously mentioned, the Liberal Democrats are well known to be efficient canvassers and campaigners in areas which they target. There are only 73 wards in our data-set where the Liberal Democrat share of the vote is greater than 70%. This is a much smaller number of wards than is the case for the Labour and Conservative parties. As a result, it is easier for the Liberal Democrats to target such a small number of wards and increase the turnout in these contests.

Table 8.15: The level of turnout according to the Liberal Democrat share of the vote in district wards.

	50-60%	60.1-70%	70.1-80%	More than 80%
1983	48.5 (89)	48.8 (28)	50.8 (4)	57.4 (1)
1987	51.0 (197)	49.8 (54)	43.8 (11)	49.3 (12)
1991	50.7 (309)	51.6 (108)	51.3 (36)	49.1 (9)
Mean	50.1 (595)	50.1 (190)	48.6 (51)	51.9 (22)

We can make a similar conclusion from the results in the three previous tables as we did when discussing the findings from the MAJOR variable - in the districts, the level of turnout does not seem to be influenced by the party political variable, because contests are not as party political as they are in London and the metropolitan boroughs.

8.9: Testing the relationship between turnout and previous marginality in district wards.

The variable measuring marginality was found to be an important determinant of turnout in both the London wards and the wards in the metropolitan boroughs. As with our previous analyses, the marginality variable was categorised into six groupings that varied

between a ward being 'very safe' (a lead of more than 35 percentage points) to the 'very marginal' (less than five percentage points difference between the parties). The results in Table 8.16 show that there are virtually identical levels of turnout between the different marginality categories. This is the case even when we compare the rates of turnout when wards could be regarded as being 'very safe' and when they are 'very marginal'.

Table 8.16: The level of turnout according to the previous marginality of wards in the district councils.

	Less than 5%	5-10%	10.1-15%	15.1-25%	25.1-35%	More than 35%
1983	45.9 (340)	45.4 (300)	44.8 (264)	44.8 (417)	44.8 (317)	46.2 (421)
1987	48.1 (449)	48.7 (374)	48.9 (349)	48.1 (571)	47.7 (484)	48.3 (805)
1991	48.5 (590)	49.1 (566)	48.7 (458)	47.7 (767)	45.9 (531)	47.6 (824)
Mean	47.5 (1379)	48.0 (1240)	47.5 (1071)	46.9 (1755)	46.1 (1332)	47.4 (2050)

An explanation for these results may be deduced from examining how the previous marginality variable was operationalised. Marginality is concerned with the closeness of the contest in the previous election. As we have only all-out elections in our data-set, then the last election took place four years ago (which is also true for London). Such a gap between elections means that it is unlikely that people would remember how close the previous election was. Hence, their decision as to whether or not to vote is unlikely to be based upon their recollection that the election was close. Political parties may not lay emphasis on the result of the previous election, because there are many more up-to-date electoral references than the result from four years ago. Campaign literature may concentrate on the latest national opinion poll for example, or could argue that the results of elections to neighbouring local councils provide a better example of the current local political state of play.

Finally, the potential relationship between previous marginality and the level of turnout was tested by carrying out a cross-tabulation between the two variables. The results in

Table 8.17 provide further evidence to support the finding from Table 8.16 that marginality is not related to turnout in the districts. Of those wards that were defined as being 'very marginal' (a margin of less than five percentage points) in 1987, 64% of them had a turnout greater than 45% at the next election in 1991. Taking this result on its own may lead us to believe that there is a relationship between this political variable and turnout, as nearly two thirds of wards produced quite a high turnout when their previous contest was close. Table 8.17 also shows, however, that 61% of wards with a margin greater than 35 percentage points (the 'very safe' wards) in 1987 had a turnout greater than 45% in 1991. We can conclude from this that the level of turnout does not seem to be dependent upon the closeness of the previous ward contest. Yet again, a political variable is not a determinant of turnout in the district wards.

Table 8.17: Cross-tabulation between turnout and previous marginality in district wards.

	Margin less than 5% Percentage of cases with turnout greater than 45%	Margin greater than 35% Percentage of cases with turnout greater than 45%
1983	54	56
1987	65	65
1991	64	61

8.10: Correlations between political/structural variables and turnout in district wards.

Correlations were conducted between the political and structural variables and turnout in every election. When the same analysis was carried out in wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs, we found significant correlations between the share of the vote for the three major parties and turnout. The results in Table 8.18 confirm that the district wards continue this pattern, although the coefficients are quite weak. The Conservative party share of the vote produced correlation coefficients with the dependent variable ranging between .12 and .22. The coefficients for the Liberal Democrat share of the vote were also positive and significant in every election, although quite low - the higher the

share of the vote for the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats in a ward, the higher the level of turnout. The variable measuring the Labour party share of the vote produced negative correlation coefficients with a range between -.25 and -.34. Hence, the higher the Labour share of the vote in a district ward, the lower the level of turnout.

The size of the electorate in a ward was not found to be an important determinant in London and the metropolitan wards. In the district wards, however, this variable produced the strongest coefficients of all the political and structural variables. The negative relationship between the two variables means that, other things being equal, the smaller the size of the electorate in a ward, the higher the turnout. This result adds support to our earlier finding in section 8.7 that the size of the electorate did seem to determine the level of turnout. There are two other variables in Table 8.18 which produced significant correlation coefficients in every election. This first variable is the one that measures the number of vacancies (VACS) in a ward election. It produced negative correlation coefficients with turnout, which suggests that the more vacancies there are in a ward, the lower the level of turnout. Similarly, the variable measuring population density (POPD) also produced negative coefficients that were significant in the three elections. We can infer from this that those wards with a low population density, i.e. non-urban wards are likely to have high levels of turnout.

Table 8.18: Correlation coefficients produced between political/structural variables and turnout in district wards.

	1983	1987	1991
CENSH	.08	.17	.17
CONSH	.19	.22	.12
ELECT	-.38	-.36	-.36
GREENSH	-.04		
INDSH		-.06	.07
LABSH	-.25	-.29	-.34
MARGIN			-.05
MAJOR		-.07	
NUMCAND	-.17	-.14	
OTHSH		-.09	.06
POPD	-.24	-.24	-.27
VACS	-.30	-.27	-.09

(Only the variables which achieved significance at the 5% level or above are included).

8.11: Correlations between socio-economic variables and turnout in district wards.

Correlations were carried out next between the socio-economic variables and turnout. Table 8.19 shows that the coefficients produced between these variables and turnout are generally higher than they were for the political and structural variables. As was the case in wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs, the relationships between these census variables and turnout are in the expected direction, but there are a few exceptions. For example, there are negative correlations between turnout and SEG1, SEG2 and SEG3N, when in the previous ward level analyses we found positive correlations. The variables measuring SEG3M, SEG4 and SEG5 provide negative coefficients as expected, but it seems that the socio-economic variables are not as important determinants of turnout as they were in London and the metropolitan wards. A variable that produced consistent results across all three types of local authorities is the proportion of unemployment in a ward. In the district wards, it has negative correlations with the turnout variable that were significant in every election.

The variables measuring the type of housing tenure in the district wards produced significant correlations with the dependent variable, turnout. There were negative coefficients between the proportion of households in a ward living in council housing and turnout, while the direction of the relationship was reversed between the proportion of households which are owner occupiers and turnout. These relationships were also found in wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs.

Another variable that produced relatively strong correlation coefficients in Table 8.19 is MIGRANTS. This variable measures the number of people in a ward who had a different address one year before the census, i.e. the people that are new to an area. We mentioned in Chapter 5 that these people are unlikely to feel a sense of attachment to the area because such feelings form over a period of time. Negative correlations were found between this independent variable and turnout - the greater the proportion of people defined as being migrants in a ward, the lower the level of turnout.

Finally, age seems to have an influence upon whether or not people voted in local elections. The variable, YOUTH, produced relatively strong correlations that were negatively associated with turnout. Research into age and voting behaviour in national elections at the individual level shows that, 'participation (in elections) increases steadily with age until it reaches a peak in the middle years, and then gradually declines with old age' (Milbrath and Goel, 1977:114). The negative coefficients for the YOUTH variable and the positive coefficients for the STUDENT variable at the aggreagate level seem to support this research finding, but the OAP variable produces positive correlation coefficients which were not expected. Similar results were found in wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs, which means that the higher the proportion of old age pensioners in a ward, the higher the level of turnout.

The results of the correlations between the socio-economic variables and turnout show that the coefficients are higher than they were for the political and structural variables. For the

time being, however, we can say very little about the determinants of turnout with any degree of certainty. Multivariate analysis will provide us with more information about the relative importance of the variables as all the independent variables will be considered together in a regression analysis.

Table 8.19: Correlation coefficients produced between socio-economic variables and turnout in district wards.

	1983	1987	1991
AGRIC	.25	.22	.25
COUNCIL	-.22	-.24	-.24
MIGRANTS	-.32	-.33	-.38
NCWP	-.05	-.10	-.15
NOBATH	.05		.07
NOCAR	-.27	-.32	-.29
NOEXWC	-.06	-.07	-.07
OAP	.06	.14	.24
OVERCRO	-.25	-.28	-.28
OWNOCC	.19	.21	.24
SEG1			-.05
SEG2	-.08	-.09	-.15
SEG3M	-.36	-.39	-.38
SEG3N	-.21	-.25	-.28
SEG4	-.34	-.40	-.39
SEG5	-.32	-.37	-.37
STUDENT	.19	.12	.09
UNEMP	-.28	-.38	-.39
YOUTH	-.23	-.34	-.44

(Only the variables which achieved significance at the 5% level or above are included).

8.12: Multivariate analysis of turnout using the political and structural variables in district wards.

The regression analysis of the districts in Chapter 5 in the all-out elections of 1983, 1987 and 1991 produced quite low values for r^2 compared to London and the metropolitan boroughs. The political and structural variables explained between 17-23% of the variation in turnout in the districts. We would expect to be able to explain more variation in the rate of turnout using the same set of variables at the ward level, than at the local

authority level. This is because variables such as the one measuring marginality (MARGIN) will have more meaning and relevance at the lower level of aggregation. At the ward level, the electorate will be voting to elect their own councillor, so the closeness of the previous ward contest is likely to be more significant than the previous political situation at the local authority level. We suggest that if marginality is going to have an impact on the level of turnout, then it will be at the ward level that it will be detected.

The results in Table 8.20 of the regressions at the ward level using just the political and structural variables show that although eleven variables successfully enter into at least one equation, the r^2 figures vary between a lowly 23% in 1991 to 28% in 1987. The average r^2 using the political and structural variables is 25%. The election of 1987 produced the best regression equation. The results in this election show that the best explanatory variable was ELECT which entered first into the equation and explained 11% of the variation in turnout. The second variable to enter into the regression equation was LABSH which explained an additional 6% of the r^2. Another six variables managed to explain the variation in turnout in 1987 which brought the r^2 up to 28%.

Six variables entered into the regression equation in all three elections. These variables included VACS and ELECT as we would have expected after our earlier bivariate examinations. We can infer from these results that turnout is likely to be high in single-member wards with small sized electorates. In addition, wards with a low measure for population density are also likely to have high levels of turnout, i.e. rural wards. Finally, the closeness of the previous ward contest is also influential on the level of turnout, but the relationship does not seem to be as strong as it was in the wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs.

Table 8.20: Explaining the variation in turnout using the political and structural variables in district wards.

	1983	1987	1991
ELECT	-.26	-.32	-.34
VACS	-.59	-.54	-.14
NUMCAND	-.51	.49	.21
CONSH	.19		
POPD	-.12	-.09	-.11
CENSH	.11		
MAJOR	-.09	-.06	.05
GREENSH	-.04		
MARGIN	-.04	-.07	-.12
LABSH		-.22	-.23
OTHSH		-.20	-.05
Constant	51	60.9	54.6
r^2 (%)	24	28	23

8.13: Multivariate analysis of turnout using the socio-economic variables in district wards.

The next stage in the regression analysis was to use the socio-economic variables on their own. We know from the correlations conducted in section 8.11, that there seem to be some quite strong relationships between a few of the variables and turnout. This section investigates how important these relationships are when all the socio-economic variables are considered together. The results in Table 8.21 show that the r^2 figures vary between 19% in 1983 to 28% in 1991. The average r^2 figure produced over the three elections was 24%, which is one percentage point lower than the average figure produced using the political and structural variables in section 8.12. The average r^2 explained by the socio-economic variables in the districts wards is significantly lower than the corresponding figure of 41% found in both London and the metropolitan wards.

In the election of the best regression equation, 1991, the most important variable was YOUTH which entered into the equation first and explained 20% of the variation in turnout. SEG3M was the next variable to enter the equation and explained an extra 4% of

the variation. The addition of another eight socio-economic variables into the regression equation produced the r^2 figure of 28%.

The most important explanatory variable in Table 8.21 is the percentage of economically active unemployed males in a ward (UNEMP), which had a negative effect on the rate of participation. Similarly, the YOUTH variable also entered the regression equation on three occasions and is negatively related to turnout. Finally, the variable measuring the number of migrants in a ward entered into each equation. We can suggest from these results that district wards that have high levels of unemployment and a socio-economic make-up consisting of a young and transitory population will, other things being equal, produce low levels of turnout.

Table 8.21: Explaining the variation in turnout using the socio-economic variables in district wards.

	1983	1987	1991
SEG3N	-.17		
UNEMP	-.16		-.26
MIGRANTS	-.14	-.20	-.15
AGRIC	-.13	.04	.06
NCWP	-.11	.14	.05
OVERCRO	-.12	-.11	
STUDENT	.09		
YOUTH	-.12	-.12	-.25
NOCAR	.17		.14
OAP	-.12		
SEG3M		-.16	-.13
SEG1		.14	.07
NOEXWC		.08	.04
OWNOCC		-.04	
NOBATH		-.05	
COUNCIL			-.04
Constant	55.2	61.0	61.6
r^2 (%)	**19**	**25**	**28**

8.14: Multivariate analysis of turnout using all the independent variables in district wards.

The final part of the regression analysis is to include all the independent variables and assess their combined impact on turnout. Table 8.22 shows that the r^2 figure varies between 30% in 1983 to 39% in 1987. The average r^2 figure achieved in the district wards using all the independent variables was 34%. Table 8.22 shows that 22 variables entered into at least one regression equation over the three elections. Eight of the eleven political and structural variables which entered into the equation when these types of variables were examined on their own, successfully entered into the regression when all the variables were considered. Four of these eight variables entered into each equation. From this we can infer that single-member wards, wards where the previous contests were close, wards with a large number of candidates and finally, wards that have a low share of the vote for 'Other' parties are likely to produce high levels of turnout.

The results in Table 8.22 show that the party political variables do not seem to be important determinants of turnout. For example, the variable measuring the number of major parties that contest a ward does not enter into any regression equation. This means that when the influence of other independent variables are taken into account, this variable is not deemed to be important. Similarly, the variables indicating the share of the vote for the three major parties, Labour, Conservative and the Liberal Democrats do not seem to be as influential in the district wards than they were in the more partisan metropolitan wards.

Finally, the socio-economic variables that were most influential when this type of variable was considered on their own continued to be important when all the variables were analysed in a regression together. For instance, the variables, YOUTH, UNEMP and MIGRANTS entered into all three regression equations. We can conclude, therefore, that having a high proportion of young people, a high level of unemployment and a high turnover of residents in a ward is an indication that a ward will produce a poor rate of voter participation.

Two major differences can be noted between the results of the regression analysis in the districts compared to the findings in London and the metropolitan wards. The first is that political variables, such as MAJOR and MARGIN, do not appear to be as influential in the district wards as in previous ward level chapters. Secondly, the r^2 figures in the district wards are much lower than those achieved in London and the metropolitan boroughs. Chapter 10 will discuss some of the reasons for these important differences.

Table 8.22: Explaining the variation in turnout using all the independent variables in district wards.

	1983	1987	1991
SEG3M	-.10	-.07	
VACS	-.54	-.55	-.19
NUMCAND	.43	.48	.26
YOUTH	-.13	-.21	-.28
OTHSH	-.14	-.12	-.04
MIGRANTS	-.16	-.10	-.09
AGRIC	.14	.08	.08
UNEMP	-.08	-.20	-.23
STUDENT	.08		.03
MARGIN	-.05	-.09	-.12
NOCAR	.18	.16	.14
POPD	-.08		
GREENSH	-.04	-.03	
SEG4	-.08		
NCWP	.08	.13	.08
OVERCRO	-.11	-.14	-.05
OAP	-.06		
ELECT		-.24	-.24
SEG1		.15	.07
CENSH		.07	.08
NOEXWC		.06	.04
NOBATH		-.04	
Constant	57.4	64.9	63.4
r^2 (%)	30	39	34

8.15: Analysing the residuals in district wards.

The regression analysis has shown that at best the independent variables can explain nearly four tenths of the variation in turnout in the district wards. This figure compares very poorly to the highest r^2 of 64% achieved in the London wards and a corresponding figure of 76% in the metropolitan wards. There are many more cases of wards in the districts, so it is more likely that the r^2 will be lower than in London and the metropolitan boroughs. The next stage of the analysis was to examine those wards whose rate of turnout the regression equations can not predict. In the wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs, a residual was defined as having a rate of turnout more than +/- two standard deviations from the mean. The residuals in this analysis use the same limits of inclusion as in the previous analyses.

A total of 420 residuals were found which met the criteria over the three elections. To give this number some significance, there were 157 residual wards in London and 215 residuals in the metropolitan wards. The residual wards in the districts were spread quite evenly across the three elections. The lowest number of residual wards appeared in the 1983 election when there were 104 wards, while the most instances of residual wards appeared in 1991 when there were 184 cases. To begin the analysis of residuals, we examined which districts the residual wards belonged to, whether there were any instances of a ward appearing as a residual more than once and finally, we attempted to explain the behaviour of a couple of persistent residuals.

Our analysis shows that 153 districts produced one or more residual ward. We expected that some districts would produce a number of residual wards, because our analysis at the local authority level indicated that some districts consistently produce poor levels of turnout. The ward level results showed that Durham City had the most number of residual wards with nine (2% of the total). This district was closely followed by Tendring and Chiltern with eight (2%) residual wards each. Seven districts, Corby, Dartford, Derbyshire

Dales, High Peak, Newark and Sherwood, Vale Royal and Wychavon all produced seven (2%) residual wards. If a district was going to have more than one residual ward, then we expected that the wards would all be either positive or negative residuals and not a combination of the two. The results show that there are 32 districts which had at least one high residual and one low residual ward. Of these, 28 had a high and low turnout ward in the same election which is especially surprising. Chiltern, for example, had eight residual wards, three positive residuals in 1983, two positive residuals in 1987 and 1991 and one negative residual in 1991.

The next step in the analysis was to identify which wards were the furthest away from the regression line, either above or below, in every election. We began by examining the positive residuals, the wards that produced a turnout rate higher than expected. We wanted to see if the residuals were wards which we had already examined because of their especially high rate of turnout, or whether they were completely different wards. Table 8.23 shows that two of the wards furthest away from the regression line with a turnout greater than expected, Flimby from Allerdale and Breadsall and Morley from Erewash, were the same ones that appeared in Table 8.1. This table illustrated the wards that had the highest rates of turnout in each election. We noted in London and the metropolitan boroughs that the wards with the highest rates of turnout were not necessarily the cases furthest from the regression line. In the districts, however, the wards with the highest rate of turnout in 1983 and 1987 are also the wards furthest from the line of best fit in these elections. The third ward in Table 8.23 is Colburn from Richmondshire. This ward produced a turnout rate of 68.3% in 1991, when the regression equation predicted a much more modest participation level of 38.9%.

Table 8.23: The residual district wards with a rate of turnout furthest above the predicted level in every election.

Year	Ward	District	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1983	Flimby	Allerdale	73.8	44.2	29.6
1987	Breadsall and Morley	Erewash	74.1	53.5	20.6
1991	Colburn	Richmondshire	68.3	38.9	29.4

The ward with the turnout furthest below the regression line in each election is displayed in Table 8.24. Queens (Rushmoor) was the only low turnout ward featured in Table 8.1 but it does not appear in Table 8.24. This means that although the Queens ward had the lowest ward turnout in each election, there are other turnout rates in wards that the regression equation struggles more to explain. What reasons can be given to explain the appearances of the three residual wards? Firstly, North Meols from West Lancashire produced a turnout nearly 20 percentage points lower than predicted in 1983. The analysis of the ward election results suggest that it is a safe ward for the Conservatives, with the party having a lead of 43 percentage points and 33 percentage points over the second placed Labour party candidate in 1983 and 1987. In these two elections, the turnout in the ward is more than ten percentage points lower than the average figure for the district. The turnout in the ward improved dramatically in 1991 to 50.5% and this level was maintained in 1995 when 46.7% of the registered electorate voted. Could the local council shed any light upon this behaviour? The respondent from the council explained that North Meols is a rural ward with a large proportion of the population employed in agriculture. It is the furthest most ward from the district's administrative centre, and is situated on the border near Sefton. The respondent was surprised that the ward produced a relatively low level of turnout in 1983 as it was believed that the socio-economic make-up of North Meols would lead to high levels of turnout. The ward was described as having a low level of council housing and a low level of unemployment. These comments were confirmed by checking the census figures. The respondent believed that the turnout in North Meols in 1983 was an isolated case.

The ward furthest away from the line of best fit in 1987 was Cirencester Beeches (Cotswold District Council). Less than a third of the electorate turned out to vote when the regression predicted that more than half of the electorate would vote. The turnout in the ward is always more than ten percentage points lower than the average figure for the district. For instance, in 1987, the average turnout in the district was 43%. The ward was described by the electoral registration officer as an ordinary ward situated on the outskirts of the town with a mixed social composition. It is generally a Tory area but the Liberal Democrats won the ward in 1987 and 1991. It was suggested that party politics are not particularly strong in the ward because Independent candidates can do very well in the local elections. Canvassing is carried out by all parties in Cirencester Beeches and there is also some door-knocking at election time. The local electoral registration officer, who also happened to live in the ward, could not suggest any reason for the low level of turnout. He did not even realise that the turnout in the ward was particularly low.

The Ashley Green and Latimer ward from Chiltern produced an exceptionally low level of turnout in the 1991 election with only 22.1% of the electorate turning out to vote. The ward is very safe for the Conservative party with the winning candidate normally having a lead of around 30 percentage points over the Liberal Democrat in second place. The turnout in the 1991 election is most definitely an outlier because the turnout in 1983 was 48%, while 55% voted in 1987 and 40% voted in the most recent election in 1995. What happened in Ashley Green and Latimer in 1991? Chiltern District Council were asked for their help but could not think of any reasons for the low turnout. They suggested asking the winning Conservative councillor. He informed us that he carried out his usual campaign and remembered nothing different in 1991 than in 1995 when he was returned to council on an average turnout. The three wards in Table 8.24 illustrate that even those closest to the result cannot produce a reason for the low turnouts.

Table 8.24: The residual district wards with a rate of turnout furthest below the predicted level in every election.

Year	Ward	District	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1983	North Meols	West Lancashire	31.4	51.3	-19.9
1987	Cirencester Beeches	Cotswold	30.6	52.9	-22.3
1991	Ashley Green and Latimer	Chiltern	22.1	50.4	-28.3

The results in Tables 8.23 and 8.24 show that no ward appeared as a residual furthest away from the regression line in more than one election. This finding is not very surprising as there are many wards in the data-set and only three elections. There are, however, wards that appear as residuals in more than one election. The analysis of the 420 residuals shows that there are 40 wards that appeared as residuals in two of the three elections and there are five wards that are residuals in every election. Table 8.25 shows these five wards that all produce rates of turnout in each election higher than the value predicted by the regression equations.

Table 8.25: The district wards that make more than two appearances as a positive residual between 1983 and 1991 (three elections).

Ward (District)	Number of appearances	Positive residual year
Tintwistle (High Peak)	3	1983, 1987, 1991
Outon (Chester-le-Street)	3	1983, 1987, 1991
Croxdale (Durham City)	3	1983, 1987, 1991
Deaf Hill (Easington)	3	1983, 1987, 1991
Bean (Dartford)	3	1983, 1987, 1991

The final part of the residuals analysis was to focus upon a couple of wards in Table 8.25 to see if we can explain the unusually high rates of turnout. The first ward we examined was the Bean ward from Dartford Borough Council. Table 8.26 shows that the ward produces a turnout, on average, more than seventeen percentage points higher than the rate predicted by the regression. What explanation can be given for this extraordinary finding?

A representative from the local council was asked to describe the ward and to suggest reasons for the ward's behaviour. Bean is described as a self-contained village or large hamlet. It is situated in the Green Belt close to the A2. Its location is somewhat isolated from the other wards which makes it different. The composition of the ward is mixed, with both detached and semi-detached private housing and a proportion of council properties including flats.

A number of similarities arise from the description of this residual ward and another persistent residual ward (Todmorden, Calderdale) from the metropolitan boroughs. Todmorden was also described as geographically isolated. The location of these two wards may engender a greater sense of community so they are not forgotten by the distant local authority. Another factor that the wards have in common concerns the role of the town and parish councils. In Todmorden, the town council was described as having a strong voice which made its feelings known. In Bean, the ward used to form part of Stone Parish Council, but some years ago, Bean became a Parish Council of its own because of population growth. The Parish has five members and is mentioned as being active within the ward.

The political situation in Bean may also provide us with an explanation for its high level of turnout. Although the Conservatives have won the ward each time the election has been held since 1983, our local respondent suggested that the Conservative and Labour parties carry out extensive canvassing in the ward, which means that there is always a well fought contest. Finally, two other possible determinants of the high turnout are the fact that the polling station is centrally located in the ward facilitating voting, and that the local councillor, a publican, is well known in the area.

Table 8.26: Actual and predicted levels of turnout in the Bean ward (Dartford).

Year	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1983	65.3	47.6	17.7
1987	64.5	42.6	21.9
1991	60.1	46.0	14.1
Mean	63.3	45.4	17.9

The second residual ward we decided to concentrate upon is Deaf Hill from Easington District Council. The ward is characterised as a compact village with a small population. The size of the electorate for the 1991 election was 1,112. It is located next door to Tony Blair's Sedgefield constituency and is described by the former Parish clerk for the ward as being remote. The Parish Council is active in the local area and our respondent suggested that there is always something in the papers about the salient local issues of the day. These factors are once again in line with the results from interviews carried out in the residual wards of Bean and Todmorden. It seems that there are too many corresponding factors between these residual wards for it to be a matter of chance.

The political contests that have taken place in the ward may also help to explain why the turnout is higher than predicted in Deaf Hill (Table 8.27). The elections are always relatively close between the two competing candidates, with less than 200 votes at most separating them over the three elections. The councillor from 1983 to 1991 was a woman who stood on the Liberal ticket, but was regarded by fellow councillors as an Independent. Perhaps, the councillor built up a personal following over time and this produced the high turnout? If this was the case, this personal following did not help the councillor in 1995, when as an Independent Labour candidate, she lost the ward to the official Labour party candidate.

Information provided by the local parties suggested that there is some friction between them in the ward. This is manifest by the extent of door knocking undertaken at election

time to get the vote out. A final potential contributory factor which may explain the high turnout is the location of the polling stations. As the ward name suggests, there is a hill in the ward which is of some considerable size. The electorate on one side of the ward were unhappy that they had to walk up the hill to vote. The electoral registration office deemed that the ward needed two polling stations for the size of the electorate, and they are positioned in places that are the most convenient for the whole electorate.

Table 8.27: Actual and predicted levels of turnout in the Deaf Hill ward (Easington).

Year	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1983	65.1	48.3	16.8
1987	65.4	50.1	15.3
1991	60.8	45.4	15.4
Mean	63.8	47.9	15.8

The final residual ward we focused upon was Gainsborough North from West Lindsey District Council. It did not appear in Table 8.25 because it was a negative residual in only two out of the three elections, those in 1983 and 1987. Table 8.28 shows that while the regression predicts a turnout of around 45% in the ward, on average, less than a third of the electorate take part in the elections. The turnout in the ward is always more than ten percentage points below the average turnout for the district. The ward is described as a low to middle class area composed of row upon row of terraced housing. About six years ago, Gainsborough Town Council was set up which elected eighteen members. At the last set of elections, however, all the wards were uncontested as there were only eighteen nominations. Our respondent from the council suggested that because West Lindsey District Council is situated in Gainsborough, the electorate may be confused about the different levels of local government and abstain from voting in the local elections out of ignorance. From a political perspective, the parties are described as being fairly active in the ward because they deliver leaflets and door-knock at election time. The phenomenon of low turnout in the ward is not only confined to the local elections. In the 1997 general

election, all the polling stations in Gainsborough produced a lower rate of turnout than the average for the constituency. Unfortunately, it seems that it is much easier to explain the behaviour of a positive residual ward than it is a negative residual ward. Even the council's electoral registration officer did not realise the turnout in this ward was low.

Table 8.28: Actual and predicted levels of turnout in the Gainsborough North ward (West Lindsey).

Year	Turnout	*PRED	*RESID
1983	28.6	44.5	-15.9
1987	31.2	47.4	-16.2
1991	37.2	45.9	-8.7
Mean	32.3	45.9	-13.6

8.16: Conclusions.

The analysis of the wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs found that a number of political and structural variables seemed to be important determinants of turnout. The investigation of the turnout variation in the district wards has broken this pattern of results. When the political and structural variables were examined individually, the number of major parties in the election, the party share of the vote for the three major parties when they receive more than 50% of the vote in a ward and previous marginality, all seemed to have little or no effect on the level of turnout. The only variables that emerged as important were the size of the ward electorate and whether the ward was represented by a single councillor. The results of the correlations between turnout and the socio-economic variables suggested that wards with a combination of a high proportion of council housing, a large proportion of the electorate categorised in SEG3M, SEG4 and SEG5 and a high level of unemployment would be likely to produce low levels of turnout.

The regression analysis showed that at best nearly 40% of the variation in the dependent variable could be explained by the independent variables in our data-set. As a result, there were a large number of wards which appeared as residuals. In fact, there were 40 wards that appeared as a residual in more than one election. As was the case in the wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs, we concentrated on a couple of these persistent residuals. By using qualitative research techniques, we were able to suggest a number of possible reasons for the exceptional rates of turnout in these wards, but sometimes even with the assistance of councillors and officers we were still unable to explain why a ward produced a turnout much lower than predicted.

Chapter 9: Local election turnout - a qualitative explanation.

9.1: Introduction.

Quantitative analysis of the determinants of turnout rates over time has enabled us to explain the majority of the variation in turnout between local authorities and wards. We know from previous chapters at both the local authority and the ward level that certain variables are influential in determining the level of turnout, but what other variables can explain the remainder of turnout variation? It would be impossible to uncover all the reasons for turnout to vary in local elections, because we do not have the information on why each individual voter decided whether to cast their vote or not. Aggregate data analysis can only achieve so much, in order to improve the analysis, we need to employ different research methods.

Three groups of people are able to assist with the explanation of why turnout is 'deviant' in a particular council. The most important group, but also the most difficult to ask are the electorate themselves. A survey of the electorate could ask respondents to provide the reasons why they did not vote in the election. The second group of people who could help to explain the behaviour of the electorate in an area are councillors, candidates and political parties. In Chapter's 6, 7 and 8 we interviewed a number of electoral registration officers to aid our explanation of some high and low turnout wards. In this chapter, we conduct in-depth interviews in two local authorities that have appeared as residuals a number of times in Chapter 5 - these local authorities are Derbyshire Dales District Council and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. The final group of people that may be able to provide an explanation for turnout variation are the people who work in the council election offices around the country. Electoral registration officers were sent a detailed questionnaire that formed part of The Rowntree Foundation project conducted into ways to enhance local electoral turnout (Rallings, Thrasher and Downe, 1995). The survey included a number of questions that were of value to the specific purpose of this thesis. The answers that the electoral registration officers gave to these questions are analysed in this chapter.

Some electoral registration officers were confused over the level of turnout in their local authority compared to the rate of voter participation in equivalent local authorities. A number of councils said that they had no idea what their level of turnout was like compared to others. A typical response was one electoral registration officer who said that he was,

> **'Not sure how we compare to other equivalent authorities and not aware of particular factors affecting the voting in the district'**
> (Mendip District Council).

Another respondent argued that,

> **'The level of turnout appears pretty much the same across local authorities in general'**
> (St. Edmundsbury Borough Council).

We have shown throughout the thesis that there are wide variations in the level of turnout across local government and there are a multitude of reasons for the level of voter participation to vary. These include differences in the structure, the political make-up and the socio-economic composition of an area which are specific to a local authority. One metropolitan council, however, continued to argue along the lines that,

> **'Low local electoral turnout compared to general elections is a national phenomenon. There are no particular local circumstances that make Coventry significantly higher or lower than elsewhere'**
> (Coventry City Council).

On the other hand, some local authorities did recognise that the turnout in their council is high, but gave no reasons for the situation. Examples of such responses included,

> **'This local authority has a history of high turnouts'**
> (North West Leicestershire District Council)

and

> **'Turnout has been traditionally high in this area'**
> (Derbyshire Dales District Council).

As these comments were not accompanied with any explanation for the high level of turnout in their council, this sets up a puzzle of why turnout varies between local authorities that we now plan to investigate.

9.2: Political factors and the level of turnout.

Our analysis of turnout in Chapter 4 found that the percentage of the electorate voting according to the different ways of holding elections was very similar. A number of respondents in our survey, however, argued that the electoral system is an important factor in determining the rate of turnout in two main ways. The effect on turnout caused by electing members by thirds or by having all-out elections is the first point of issue. It was argued that holding elections by thirds will influence the level of turnout over time. This is because the frequency of elections means that factors including the local and national political situation at the time of the election, the national and/or local issues that are currently important, and how close the general election is to the local elections, will all have an impact on turnout. It is argued by some local authorities that electing by thirds,

> **'encourages people to vote because there are elections in many wards every year and they get into the habit of voting'**
> (Penwith District Council).

Annual elections also keep the issues fresh in the public eye. In contrast to this view, however, is the argument put forward by a number of local authorities that the high incidence of elections over a given period could also be a 'turn off' for a number of voters because of voter fatigue. This complaint may not just dilute interest in participating in local elections, but could also exhibit itself in deciding whether or not to vote in a future general election. An example of voter fatigue could be observed from the low turnout in the 1992 local elections which were held about four weeks after the general election.

The second point which our respondents believed helped to determine the level of turnout was the type of local election that the electorate were being asked to participate in. The

distribution of functions, and therefore, responsibility for spending heavily favours the county councils. If there was a clear relationship between local spending and council accountability, we would expect to find turnout to be considerably higher for the county councils responsible for such services as education and social services. We have not analysed the turnout in county councils in our analysis, but research by Rallings and Thrasher has shown that, 'the disparity between county and district elections is both marked and consistent ...between six and nine per cent more voters habitually turn out for the supposedly lower tier elections' (1992:2). One quote from a respondent supported this research finding and summarises the situation for a number of other local authorities,

> **'It has been noticed that the turnout for county council elections is markedly lower than that for district elections'**
> (Rugby Borough Council).

Another part of the electoral system that is often put forward for criticism is the method of voting. An electoral registration officer wrote that,

> **'I do believe that the biggest obstacle to increase voter participation lies in the existing political system. Many of those who do hold political views are I feel put off by the fact that their individual vote will not be seen to make any difference whether they vote for a winning candidate or (as the majority do) the losing candidates'**
> (Dover District Council).

Following on from this point, the most important political determinant of turnout mentioned by our respondents was the closeness of the contest. There is a widespread belief that if one political party is dominant in a local authority or ward, then it is rational not to participate. As we have seen throughout this thesis, the variable measuring previous marginality has an impact in the three types of local authority. One respondent supported the point by arguing that,

> **'This local authority consists of 47 members. The Labour Party currently hold 46 seats with the Conservatives only holding one. There is probably a large amount of apathy surrounding the political situation'**
> (Newport Borough Council).

This political stability is common throughout some areas of local government. For example, one elections officer makes the point that,

> **'There has been no change in political control since the inception of the council in 1955'**
> (Epping Forest District Council).

Similarly, voters in some wards will never get to see their favoured party win an election. The only way that their vote will count in electing a candidate of their choice will be if they moved to another ward. There is evidence from the questionnaires to support the views outlined above. For example, one respondent made the point that,

> **'It is noticeable (although not necessarily correlated) that as the majority party has increased its majority over the years the level of turnout has declined'**
> (Oxford City Council).

When one party is entrenched in a local authority, another piece of evidence which suggests that there is not a real contest taking place is when wards are not contested by all three major political parties. We noticed in the ward level chapters that local government is extremely party politicised in London and the metropolitan boroughs, with most wards having elections involving the full slate of candidates from the three major parties. In the districts, however, over 11% of wards had only one major party contesting the election. One respondent from the districts wrote that,

> **'There are very few political candidates. Only 50% of wards were contested in 1995'**
> (North Cornwall District Council).

This lack of political competition may have a negative impact on the level of turnout. With some seats being frequently returned unopposed, this may send a message to the electorate that as the parties are not interested in the contest, why should they be. To counteract this argument, however, just because the three major parties are not competing, it does not

necessarily mean that turnout will be depressed. This is because the role of the so-called 'Other' parties can be significant. A council officer from a rural area wrote that,

> **'Experience leads me to believe that independent candidates command higher turnouts than political candidates'**
> (Penwith District Council).

In contrast to the safe party political havens in some local authorities, there are many areas in local government where the use of the vote is seen as having some effect in deciding the outcome of every election. A number of respondents argued that if a local authority is politically balanced and volatile, then this normally generates significant interest and may have an effect on the level of turnout. The two quotations below support this position, while the third respondent is awaiting the effect on the level of voter participation as a result of a change in the political make up of their local authority. Firstly, it is argued that,

> **'There are some wards in which there is closer political balance and they tend to show higher turnout'**
> (North Tyneside Metropolitan Council).

The second point is that,

> **'The highest turnout has been in the most affluent areas where there have been closely fought campaigns resulting in some changes in political representation'**
> (Cambridge City Council).

A final respondent outlined the situation in their local authority,

> **'In the past it was generally known as a Conservative safe area. However, this has changed dramatically with their majority now at two. It remains to be seen if this makes a difference to the turnout levels'**
> (Spelthorne Borough Council).

The closeness of the contest, therefore, seems to be an important factor, but what can be done to generate more people going to the polls? A large proportion of our respondents

believed that campaigning by the political parties was the answer. One electoral registration officer for example, explained that the turnout in their local authority is higher than average,

> **'because of the political balance on the council leading to quite vigorous campaigning in certain wards'**
> (West Lancashire District Council).

Where there is potential for seats to change hands across parties, there are often very active political parties competing to get the vote out. One respondent from a high turnout local authority wrote that,

> **'Every household receives party literature, nobody can therefore offer the excuse of not knowing an election is taking place'**
> (High Peak Borough Council).

If all the main political parties and the range of independent and 'Other' parties are also campaigning, then there can be as many as eight or nine leaflets delivered to every household. How effective is this campaigning in getting the vote out? The hypothesis is that the more active the campaign, the better the return in terms of a higher level of turnout (see Denver and Hands, 1971). If this is correct, then parties should concentrate their campaigns in areas where they think a high turnout amongst their supporters is most important in deciding the outcome of the election. There are a number of examples from the survey which illustrate the important role that parties can play. For example, one council representative commented that,

> **'Canvassing by parties varies from year to year. In wards where a higher rate of canvassing is undertaken an increase in turnout is noticeable'**
> (Tamworth Borough Council),

while another respondent suggested that,

> **'Targeted campaigning by the Conservative party in particular influences the turnout'**
> (Poole Borough Council).

There is also a specific example where an electoral registration officer wrote that,

> **'In certain years turnout in some wards has been increasing apparently due to a high profile campaign by the candidates. For example, in 1987 the 'Moderate Labour Party' fielded candidates in many wards - this party was believed to have been formed by the UDM (Union of Democratic Mineworkers) and may have increased turnout that year'**
> (Mansfield District Council).

It comes as no surprise that campaigns by parties to increase the rate of turnout at the local level can be successful, because there is more scope to increase turnout levels in local elections than at general elections, as the level of abstention is higher in the local contests. On average, about 60% of the electorate do not vote in local elections compared to a figure of around 25-30% of the electorate which abstain from national elections.

One metropolitan borough made the point that the level of turnout is highest in a particular area within their local authority because,

> **'The major parties maintain a continuous high profile with regular bulletins/literature delivered to each house throughout the year, as opposed to many candidates who only leaflet prior to an election or some not at all'**
> (Tameside Metropolitan Borough).

In some areas of the country the political parties are not so active, in fact, they may not produce any party political material or even canvass any of the area. This lack of effort to get the vote out may help to contribute to the low level of turnout which is evident in some local authorities. An example of this unhealthy democratic situation is a council which argued that,

> **'The candidates themselves could do much more to encourage a good turnout. For example, at a Parish by-election the turnout was only 8%. The parish had not requested poll cards and neither candidate had canvassed, so very few people knew that an election was taking place'**
> (Eden District Council).

If no canvassing is carried out in some areas of local government, is there a role for the local council to fill the void? One respondent supported this idea by suggesting that,

> **'If the parties/candidates are not prepared to improve the flow of information to voters, it could at least become possible for the Returning Officer to include candidates details on official poll cards so that electors are aware as to whom is seeking election'** (Leeds City Council).

Other respondents were opposed to this suggestion, arguing that this type of action would be going too far. Such a scheme may be interpreted as being 'political', when a electoral registration officer should be neutral.

The final factor from a political context which may help to influence the level of turnout are the candidates competing in the election. The question of the performance of politicians both locally and nationally is deemed by some electoral registration officers to be quite an important consideration to the electorate. In some local authorities there is,

> **'the feeling that they are all as bad as one another'** (Vale of the White Horse District Council),

but the ability, qualifications and popularity of the candidate can have a significant impact on turnout. The councillors that are well known in a community and are seen to have worked hard for the local area are often rewarded by a good turnout. What may have been regarded as a rogue turnout figure when the raw data is analysed, can now be partially understood by using qualitative methods of inquiry into the quality and personality of the local candidate. There is the chance that national issues and politicians could swamp the political agenda at local election time, which may result in the personality and following of the councillor being overridden and ignored. The fact that the general election was held on the same day as the local elections in 1997, inevitably meant that some Conservative councillors were punished at the local level by the poor showing of the national party at the general election.

To conclude this section, we can say that political variables such as the closeness of the contest, campaigning and the role of candidates etc. have the potential to influence the rate of turnout. One council officer's response to the question which asked him what factors helped to explain the turnout rate in their local authority, signified this point perfectly. He wrote that,

> **'Brighton is fairly evenly divided in terms of political support for the two main parties and with two Universities in the town there are many political activists. All this generates plenty of publicity and interest in our elections especially as several of our wards are marginal. Annual elections also keep interest high'**
> (Brighton Borough Council).

The evidence in this section confirms that political variables should be taken into account when attempting to decipher the puzzle of high or low levels of turnout. It seems that the onus is on the political parties and central government to attempt to increase the level of turnout in a local authority.

9.3: Apathy in local elections - what are the reasons?

We asked local authorities for their opinion on why the level of turnout is low in local elections. A comment from one respondent captured the mood of many local authorities,

> **'I think that nationally there is a general feeling of apathy towards government and voting'**
> (Portsmouth City Council).

Apathy in local elections is not a recent phenomenon as turnout in local elections in this country has never been at a level considered to be high. There are a multitude of reasons why apathy exists in local elections. It can depend upon the social context, party identification, personal attitudes, the actions of the government and local parties, the role of the media and many other reasons. One of these other reasons could be that voters believe that the election is not very important and so ignore it. This feeling of apathy that manifests itself in low turnout is on a different scale in local elections than it is at general elections,

where turnout is on average more than 30 percentage points higher. So, why is there more apathy in local elections than in general elections?

The answers our respondents gave suggested that there are three main parts to the problem of apathy. The first is that the powers of local government are declining over time, and this change in the distribution of power is reflected in the low level of support given to the system by the electorate turning out to vote. The second point is that people are confused by the system of local government and do not take part because of this reason. Both of these points and others, combine to produce the third argument which is that local elections are being treated as a side-show in the battleground for control at Westminster. We shall now examine these three arguments in turn.

Local elections are generally not seen to be very important to the electorate compared to general elections. Respondents from our survey suggested that although the reasons for low turnout are many and varied, they believed that the principal cause was almost certainly rooted in the dominance of central government over local government, and the severe limits of local discretion over policy and levels of expenditure. There is no doubt that the decline of local government power has accelerated over the last fifteen years. Centralisation, privatisation, and quango-isation (if there is not such a word, then there is now) have all occurred for the general public to experience as part of their normal working day. It is these changes which our respondents felt were influential factors in determining the rate of turnout. For example, one electoral registration officer argued that,

> **'There is apathy to local government generally, because a change in local control may not result in noticeable changes when so much is directed and controlled by central government'**
> (London Borough of Enfield).

Another respondent agreed by arguing that,

> **'people are despondent, fed up with democracy, but will not do anything to change the situation'**
> (Havant Borough Council).

A pessimistic view of the situation was put by one electoral registration officer who suggested that,

> **'No amount of campaigning or anything else will overcome electoral apathy until this situation (of dominance from the centre) changes'**
> (Coventry City Council).

If this is indeed the case, then we might have expected the level of turnout to decline in line with the lessening power of local government. Turnout has remained at roughly the same level over the last 50 years, however, so perhaps this change in the power relationship is given too much credence by those who work within local government.

In reality, how many people base their decision on whether or not to vote in a local election on how much power their local council wield? Just how aware are the electorate generally of the system of local government? It seems more likely that some people do not participate in local elections not because of the lessening power of local government, but because there is widespread ignorance over what they are voting for. Miller found in his research that, 'Only 31 per cent of the electorate (in his survey) knew their councillor's name in November and only 42 per cent could name their newly elected councillor in May' (1988:20). Our respondents suggested that the system of local government in this country is seen to be too complicated. This results in people not appreciating local government because they do not know what their local council does. There also seems to be confusion between the county council elections and the district elections. A quote from one local authority extends the level of misunderstanding to an even lower level of devolved power,

> **'The electorate do not understand the difference between district and parish councils and do not seem interested. Also at the parish level, unless the candidates canvass they are not prepared for the size of the ballot paper when they arrive at the polling station (e.g. vote for twelve from 26)'**
> (East Hampshire District Council).

Where there is interest in local affairs a high level of turnout may result. One local authority mentioned that they had a higher than average level of turnout because there was an awareness of the local political process as many people are involved serving on local (town/parish) councils. Unfortunately, such comments were rare amongst the respondents in our survey.

It is little wonder that there is not a complete understanding of the complexities surrounding the different tiers and responsibilities in local elections, and the situation is not made easier when local elections across the country are not dominated by local issues and the performance of the local council, but are hijacked by national politics. This is the common argument of local elections being used as an opinion poll on national issues, so that voting at the local level tends to reflect the state of the national political parties. There seems to be little that can be done to change the situation. One respondent wrote that,

> **'People cannot be forced to vote or to perceive local government as relevant to them'**
> (Uttlesford District Council).

In an ever increasing party political environment at local elections, with fewer Independent candidates being successful, the major parties try very hard to put up their full slate of candidates to give the electorate the chance to vote for their preferred party. In wards where a party stands little chance of becoming elected, 'paper candidates' are often put forward. It is likely that they will do little or no canvassing, and are just on the ballot paper for the sake of the party. How can we blame people for not voting for someone in a local election who has made no effort in the campaign to get elected? One local authority made this precise point,

> **'there was a lack of enthusiasm by electors for voting for people they do not know'**
> (Oxfordshire County Council).

What is ironic is that there are cases of these so-called 'paper candidates' getting elected. This seems to illustrate that national party political considerations can often outweigh those at the local level.

A final point that may also lead to the electorate being apathetic in local elections is that these elections do not tend to attract as much media attention compared to national elections. While the affairs of parliament are in the public eye nearly every day on television, little national media attention is given to local government, even the coverage of local contests in the local press is variable. One respondent to the survey wrote that,

> **'efforts are always made to encourage greater interest by the local media but so far with very little effect'**
> (Carrick District Council).

Another council noted that they,

> **'try to involve the local media by providing them with information on candidates and issuing press releases'**
> (North Cornwall District Council).

If the media do not believe the subject to be 'news-worthy', then it will not be run. It is the parliamentary elections that attract the attention of the media. As more and more people rely upon television and newspapers to form their political opinions, and local elections barely feature, then this could be a contributory factor in determining the low level of turnout, and turnout may decline over time.

Who do our respondents believe are the people that are not taking part in local elections? There will always be some people who will never be interested in voting in local elections. Previous research suggests, however, that there are only a small percentage of people who never go to the polls (Crewe *et al.*, 1977). This means that there are many people who need to be encouraged to take part in an election again and not abstain. The biggest problem in getting these people out to vote is the feeling that there is more apathy amongst the younger

generation than any other age group. If this is correct, then the problem may well get worse over time as these young adults get older. One in six of the electorate belong to the 18 to 25 age group, but at the 1992 general election over 2.5 million of them failed to vote, accounting for more than a third of this age group in the UK (British Youth Council, 1995). This problem was noticed by a large number of our respondents who suggested that resources should be concentrated on improving turnout amongst young people. One plan was to provide schools with more information on electoral registration and voting, because guidance to students is often lacking in the formal curriculum. It is hoped that schemes that inform the young about the important role of local government could have a long-term effect of reducing the current high levels of apathy that exist in local elections.

9.4: Local issues and the level of turnout.

How local are local elections? This is a question that academics frequently ask to establish whether national considerations are more important than local issues in second tier elections. The best way of discovering if a local issue is important in determining whether people will vote, is to ask the electorate by using a survey. Research has found that, '...over half (of the respondents) claimed that their local election voting choice was determined 'more by local issues than by national issues" (Miller, 1988:23). More recent research from the 1994 wave of the British Election Study Panel Interviews supported these findings by concluding that in local elections, 'local considerations were claimed to be primary by nearly half the voters, and this fits uneasily with the notion that local elections are simply second-order ones in which voters record their views of the national government' (McLean *et al.* 1995:7). This figure seems intuitively to be very high as the electorate are thought to be ill-informed about local politics and the issues that affect them. Miller is also wary with similar findings from his research. He asked,

> 'how can local issues be so influential when so many cannot even name a local issue, and when so very few quote local issues as the ones they feel strongly about. (Perhaps) the electorate likes to think of itself as locally orientated in local government elections' (1988:23/24).

Local issues have the potential to be at the centre of debate at election time. The issue does not have to be a specific 'local' issue, but could be a national issue that is important locally, for example, the level of unemployment in the area. Campaigning may then revolve around the party political debate on the way that this issue of local concern could be improved by the range of political parties. So, what evidence is there from the comments of electoral registration officers of a local issue being influential in affecting the level of turnout in their local authority?

Supporters of local elections being an 'annual general election' would argue that because the electorate is largely attuned to the national media coverage of elections, it will probably be rare for a local issue to have such a dramatic effect on the local political situation and increase the level of turnout. One local authority wrote that they have an average level of turnout because there is,

> **'lack-lustre campaigning on local issues'**
> (Harlow District Council).

There are many examples from across local government, however, which show that local issues can be important. Such information would have been impossible to pick up in any statistical analysis, hence the advantage of using qualitative analysis. One respondent wrote that,

> **'A local issue can get people to go and vote when otherwise they wouldn't. At a parish poll about a sports centre I once met an old lady in her seventies who had never voted before but was going to vote because she felt that the issue directly affected her'**
> (Northavon District Council).

A local issue does not just have an effect upon the odd individual, because as one respondent put it,

> **'Certain local issues have influenced turnout and indeed the way in which people voted politically - this was shown dramatically this year when the make-up of the council changed'**
> (Salisbury District Council).

Examples of specific issues that greatly affected the level of turnout in a council were the following:

- **'A proposed marina for Swanage resulted in a 80% district/town election turnout and subsequently a parish poll'**
  (Purbeck District Council).

- **'The construction of a river barrage recently increased the level of turnout in a number of wards'**
  (Newport Borough Council).

- **'In this area we have a strong 'green' lobby and if there is a current environmental issue at the time of the election, then turnout increases. (e.g. Tesco store/tree felling that gained national publicity)'**
  (Stroud District Council).

- **'Controversial planning proposals/decisions (e.g. in/out of town residential developments : road/rail access : continued free car-parking : educational medical community facilities) all have an impact on turnout levels'**
  (West Oxfordshire District Council).

Game suggests that many of the turnout figures that would previously have been regarded as being blips, can now be explained by relating them to the impact of a local issue. He provides a number of examples in addition to those from our questionnaire.

> 'In 1990, voters in affected Kent districts were concerned about the impact of the Channel Tunnel and the associated rail link: in Richmond it was the future (or lack of it) of that London boroughs world famous ice rink: in Conservative marginal Rochford it was the attempted closure of the local fire station, and in nearby Basildon a central issue was the town centre shops threatened by the controversial growth of out of town superstores and retail warehouses' (1991:207).

The list of local issues that are important at any local election is undoubtedly a long one, and it is virtually impossible to know about every issue that may have an influence at local election time. The sample of local issues above, however, highlights the fact that there are a number of local events which are potentially important. If a local issue is 'live' during the time of the election, then it may be influential in determining the level of turnout.

The impact of a local issue depends upon a number of factors, such as the level of support that has been built up by various agencies such as the media and pressure groups, and the type of area where the election is taking place. Some local authorities confirmed these points by answering that they perceived their level of turnout to be average, because there were no contentious issues in any ward of the council strong enough to arouse the feelings of the public to turn out and vote. Another respondent supported the second point by writing that local issues are more likely to arouse interest in the middle-class, which are a group that have a high turnout anyway because of their education and income levels. Some areas may have a better chance of an issue being an important variable, because if a council elects by thirds then there are more opportunities for an issue to become prominent at election time. It should also be remembered that some issues would probably only relate to the ward affected, so that the increased rate of voter participation in a ward could in turn be lost when an average turnout figure is calculated for the local authority. To conclude, there is no doubt that the existence of local issues can provide some of the explanation as to why the rate of turnout varies in local government elections.

9.5: Geographical factors and the level of turnout.

Electoral analysis in the past has often completely overlooked the effect of geography. For the share of the parties vote, research would generally talk of a swing of x per cent which was consistent across the country. There was no consideration of place as it did not seem to matter where people voted. There has been great leaps forward in attempting to explain the current state of the parties according to regions of the country (see Taylor and Johnston, 1979 and Johnston, Shelley, Taylor (eds.) 1990) but there has been little emphasis placed on the variation in the level of turnout according to geography. The responses of electoral registration officers around the country, show that this topic can help to explain why turnout is high/low in particular local authorities.

There are a number of variables from the census which can help to explain the variation in the level of turnout. For example, the measure for population density and the percentages employed in certain industries such as agriculture have been found to be more influential in the district wards than in wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs. What is needed in addition to these data, however, is detailed and specialist knowledge of the area. This information can be uncovered by interviewing people who live and/or work in the area in question.

A number of respondents made the point that geography is an important factor in explaining the level of turnout. Most of these answers centred on the belief that,

> **'as a rural authority turnout at local elections is generally good - rural populations have a tradition of greater interest in local affairs/politics than urban areas'**
> (Richmondshire District Council).

There are a number of reasons why it is quite surprising to find higher levels of turnout in rural rather than urban areas. We shall consider three such reasons that were mentioned in the responses from the questionnaire. The first is that some voters in rural areas will have to travel considerable distances to get to the nearest polling station. Previous research has indicated that there is an inverse relationship between distance and voting: people are more likely to vote the closer they live to the polling station (Taylor, 1975). The second point is that because by definition, rural areas are composed of small hamlets and villages and not big towns, it is very difficult for political parties to canvass as well as they do in urban areas. One electoral registration officer supported this point by writing that,

> **'as the city is a tight compact urban area it is comparatively easy for the parties to canvass by personal visit and literature which may encourage more people to vote'**
> (Gloucester City Council).

The final point is that it may be easier to have some sense of belonging and involvement in an urban area than in a rural area. As one electoral registration officer wrote,

> **'A strong sense of civic identity in this compact urban constituency has a significant influence on turnout'**
> (Exeter City Council).

On the other hand, one responding local authority argued that their turnout was above average because,

> **'closely knit rural communities tend to facilitate greater awareness of local authority provision/effectiveness'**
> (Forest of Dean District Council).

Other local authorities have a unique problem, where there seems to be no possible remedy to increase the level of turnout. For example, one respondent wrote that,

> **'This local authority covers the Highlands of Scotland with its own culture, language and geographical situation (over 10,000 square miles)'**
> (Highlands Regional Council).

Another problem that may restrict turnout levels in a number of places came from a respondent who explained that,

> **'the nature of the topography of Plymouth gives rise to it being very hilly - this can put off a number of people from voting'**
> (Plymouth City Council).

The partial solution to this problem would be to have more polling stations. A large number of respondents noted that the number of polling stations a local authority uses has the potential to determine whether people make the effort to vote or not. As an extreme example, if a polling station was next door to your home, it is more likely that a person would vote than if a journey of say ten miles had to be completed in order to vote. The evidence from the electoral registration officer's supports the view that conveniently located and accessible polling stations are important. A couple of local authorities wrote that it has helped to increase turnout levels where they have been able to find alternative polling stations as close as possible to the majority of people. For example, one respondent wrote that,

> **'The location of a polling station away from main housing in one polling district (now relocated in mobile unit on housing estate) reflected in a higher turnout'**
> (Redditch Borough Council).

Some local authorities seem to be aware of the situation and attempt to provide extra polling stations so that people do not have to walk so far. One comment from our questionnaires was that,

> **'Turnout is low - councillors and the electoral registration officer are looking at the provision of extra polling stations to make the walk to the station shorter in some areas'**
> (Blyth Valley Borough Council).

This policy can be problematic for the council, however, because there area limited number of suitable sites for polling stations. The siting of polling stations is often criticised by members of the public, who argue that they are not positioned in the 'correct' place, or they are often moved about between elections when they should remain established in the same place so they become identifiable. One electoral registration officer noted that it is not just the general public who complain about the polling stations,

> **'The council always blame the low level of turnout on the location of the polling station, which is unjustifiable. They never accept that the candidates are not worth voting for'**
> (Swansea City Council).

Political parties are another source of complaint about the location of polling stations. One elections officer wrote that,

> **'I can recall a complaint from a ward branch of one of the political parties that the turnout in one polling station was the lowest in the ward during the local election because of the location of the polling station. Investigation of the figures showed that it had indeed the lowest turnout of voters in that ward. Further investigation, however, showed that it had the highest turnout of voters in that ward at a later parliamentary general election'**
> (Rotherham Metropolitan Borough).

The council's policy on the location and the number of polling stations could be important to a number of potential electors. Hence, local authorities should consider their current practice and decide whether an increase in the number of polling stations is possible and financially viable.

9.6: Social factors and the level of turnout

As was the case with the geographical factors in section 9.5, we have a number of social variables from the census which help to explain the differences in turnout levels between local authorities. For example, we have figures for the proportion of people in an area who are unemployed, those who live in council housing and those people who belong to the professional/managerial class in every ward in every local authority. The data analysis in previous chapters has indicated that social variables can be influential determinants of turnout. What information can be gathered from the survey responses about the importance of social variables as determinants of turnout? One electoral registration officer began by noting that,

> **'My feeling is that turnout is usually higher in more affluent areas'**
> (Uttlesford District Council).

Of course, it depends how you define 'affluent', but as we have seen throughout this thesis, turnout is usually higher in wards and local authorities which the census variables indicate are relatively well-off areas. There are many observations made in the questionnaire which help to explain some of the variation in turnout, that could not have been found from the quantitative analysis alone. One local authority provided a very good example,

> **'As a new town authority there is no established community and a very mobile population. Unless there is a very local public issue it appears that national political considerations are prime factors in voting'**
> (Redditch Borough Council).

The use of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis is a necessity for this type of research. For instance, we have shown in Chapter 5 that there are negative correlations between turnout and the variable measuring the proportion of 'non-whites' in an area. From this information we can infer that a low level of turnout will be produced in areas with a large non-white population. This expectation is supported by a comment from a respondent who wrote that,

> **'being a multi-racial/multi-cultured authority with a good deal of deprivation, there are many people who are not familiar with the electoral process. This turnout in our borough is low compared to other London boroughs'**
> (London Borough of Newham).

But, in addition to this information we need to consider what steps each local authority takes to help everyone in their borough to vote. Do councils provide guidance in ethnic languages so the electoral process can be understood by all? The responses to our questionnaires showed that some local authorities provide helpful leaflets while other councils do nothing at all.

A number of variables put forward by some local authorities are unique to particular areas. One such example is a council which wrote that,

> **'There are a considerable number of itinerant persons who reside in the borough during the winter months and then move on'**
> (Torbay Borough Council).

These people are registered as living in the local authority in October but are not in the area to vote come the next May elections. Students are another group that can influence the level of turnout in the area. If the election is held when students are on holiday, then they may not vote unless they have applied for an absent vote.

Respondents to the questionnaire also cited the influence of a lack of community spirit as being a reason for a low level of voter participation, while another wrote that their turnout is

above average because the electorate in their local authority are generally interested in council affairs. Another local authority agreed by saying that there is a,

> **'reasonable amount of awareness amongst a fairly articulate electorate'**
> (The Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames).

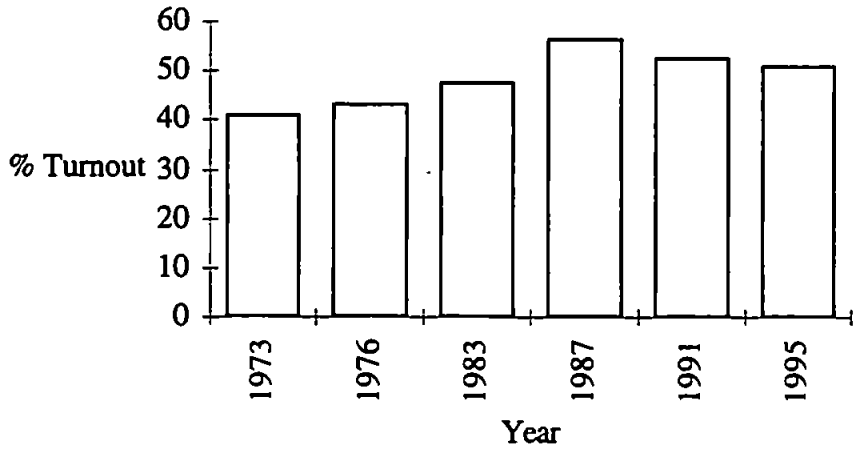
These comments provide valuable background as to why turnout levels should be especially high or low in some places rather than others. The community spirit issue is an interesting comment to find from our questionnaires as a number of residual wards in previous chapters mentioned the existence of having some sort of community feeling in their ward as being part of the reason for their high level of turnout. We have now discussed a number of areas where electoral registration officers believe could be important in determining the level of turnout in local elections. The next section focuses upon an example of a district council that produces a high turnout in every election. The examination of this local authority helps us to understand why the high turnout is received and may in turn assist us in the explanation of the variation in turnout rates across local government. The following section concentrates on a low turnout local authority, that of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, and attempts to discover the reasons for their continued low level of turnout.

9.7: A case-study of Derbyshire Dales District Council.

We found in Chapter 4 that the average turnout in Derbyshire Dales placed it in the top ten districts with the highest average levels of turnout (Table 4.11). In Chapter 5, the district appeared as a residual at the local authority level in two out of the three all-out elections between 1983 and 1991 (Table 5.40). In Chapter 8, we showed that a ward from the district, Youlgreave, had the highest ward turnout in the election of 1991 (Table 8.1), and of the 62 high turnout wards in the district data-set, Derbyshire Dales contributed more than a tenth of the cases. Finally, the district produced seven residuals in the ward level analysis. Six of these wards provided rates of turnout higher than those predicted by the regression equation using all the independent variables. Figure 9.1 shows the level of turnout in the

district over a 22 year period. This illustration and the brief summary of where the turnout rates in Derbyshire Dales have previously appeared in this thesis, indicates that there is something special about the district which results in more people turning out to the polls than in other areas - why is this the case?

Figure 9.1: The level of turnout in Derbyshire Dales District Council (1973-1995).



There are three main areas of inquiry that were followed. The first was to examine the role of the local council. Is there anything that the electoral registration office do especially to help people become registered? Also, does the council carry out any schemes or initiatives to encourage people to vote? An officer from the local council was interviewed to help with these questions.

The second area to examine was to see if there is anything special about the local area which may lead to high levels of turnout. Does the location of some of the wards influence the proportion of people voting? What is the socio-economic composition of the wards, and do people in the area think that this factor is influential? How well read is the local press in the area? Are there any local issues that are prominent at election time? These questions were put to a small sample of people who live in the district, to ascertain their views on why the turnout is high in their council.

Finally, we examine the political situation of the council to see if there are any political factors which may be influential. We consider the effect of party organisation on the level of turnout and determine whether there are any candidates whose popular personality causes a high proportion of people to go to the polls. Overall, we are interested in discovering any political reasons that can be found locally which may contribute towards the high turnout in the district. The leaders of the main political parties in the district were interviewed to help answer these questions.

Our research in Derbyshire Dales indicates that the council does not have any problem producing an accurate electoral register. A canvass is undertaken every year using canvassers who have local knowledge of the area and it proves successful. The council estimate that they are missing less than 1% of the eligible people in the local authority. This compares with some London boroughs which estimate that they are missing more than 15% of people who should appear on the register. The council uses various types of nationally produced publicity to advertise the fact that people should register every year. This information is displayed at Parish Councils, local libraries and at Post Offices across the district. With regard to absent voting, they place an advertisement in the local newspapers which mentions the closing date for an absent vote, but no other forms of media are used. The electoral registration office thought that this area of voting was the responsibility of the candidates and the political parties.

Another area of electoral administration that may affect the level of turnout are polling stations. The council reported that the location of their polling stations were good. They take the view that each community should be served by a polling station rather than cause people to travel. The respondents from the political parties believe that the local electoral registration office do a good job. For instance, there is some co-ordination between the council administration and all the political parties, e.g. absent voter forms are given to the parties automatically, they do not have to ask the office to provide them with forms as is the

practice in other local authorities. One of our respondents concluded that there is a tradition of thoroughness in electoral registration in Derbyshire Dales District Council.

The final area where the council may play a role in determining a high level of turnout is the way that they conduct their business with the public. One way that the public get involved in the local council is by attending the council meetings. In the past, the public interest in the meetings was confined to the proverbial 'one man and his dog', but they now open up council meetings for people to speak and advertise this opportunity in a number of places such as the local library. This initiative has proved to be successful as up to 20 or 30 people now regularly turn up to the full council meetings. The respondent noted that these meetings are not normally the interesting ones, so this level of attendance is even more impressive.

The second area of inquiry concerns factors such as the social make-up and location of the area. Apart from the census, what other evidence can be gathered about the social composition of the local authority? To obtain this information we interviewed a randomly selected number of people who lived in the area. They were asked to describe the ward where they lived and to suggest any factors that may influence the level of turnout in Derbyshire Dales. We did not inform the respondents that the turnout in the district is regarded as being high compared to equivalent local authorities. Their responses revolved around four main themes. Firstly, they suggested that there are pockets of well-off areas within the districts, and these places were likely to produce high levels of voter participation. Secondly, there is very little ethnic population in the area, and this factor has been found to have an inverse relationship to levels of turnout in elections. According to 1991 census figures, using the Hartington and Doverdale ward as an example, there are only .06% of the population belonging to the 'non-white' category. The third theme mentioned by our respondents was that the area is very rural which may also positively influence the level of turnout. Using the Hartington and Doverdale ward again as an example, more than 20% of the population in this ward worked in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries when the census was carried out in 1991.

The overriding point that came through in the interviews and makes up the fourth theme of answers given by our respondents, was the role of 'community'. It was argued that the area is composed of strong communities with distinct sense of identities. For example, Ashbourne is a ward that was regarded as having a strong sense of identity. One of our respondents commented that all the wards that have nicknames (which includes Ashbourne), are places that are 'as one', where people are proud to come from the ward. To illustrate this point, the councillor of the Ashbourne ward is expected to come and support the local Cricket Club. It was suggested that the support which he shows towards the local team will be reciprocated by support at the polls. This ward also highlights the fact that party politics does not dominate the council. In 1995, the result of the ward election meant that Ashbourne was represented by a councillor from the each of the three main parties. People did not vote according to party lines, but according to the personality of the candidates. As a result, one of the existing councillors (who was allegedly unpopular) came fourth and lost his seat. This clearly illustrates that we still have personal voting in the districts where some people vote because they know the candidate. This is not really possible in larger urban areas in the districts and in London and the metropolitan boroughs.

Another factor that comes under the banner of social/cultural reasons for high turnout is one of identity. A whole village may be contained in a single district ward, which means that a large proportion of people will participate in the district elections because they are seen to be closer to the people. The electorate find it easier to identify with the district elections as it is their local area and they may even know a candidate that is standing in a ward. The turnout is lower at the county council elections than the district elections in Derbyshire Dales, because the county is seen to be remote and the Labour party is dominant at this level.

Figure 9.1 showed that turnout in the district has been high over the last 20 or so years. Going back even further in time shows that turnout has been traditionally high in this area. One respondent mentioned that part of the reason for this is that people seem to enjoy the electoral process as they get to meet their friends when they vote. He believed that voting in

the district was a habit which was social as well as political. Once the parents vote, participation in the electoral process is encouraged through the generations. None of our respondents seemed able to explain why such a good habit of voting started here in the first place. Some of the interviewees thought that the high turnout was because the electorate was composed of good citizens, but what reasons can be given to substantiate this claim? An official from the council argued that not only does the high level of turnout show good citizenship, but this citizenship can manifest itself in other ways. The example the respondent gave was that people did not seem to hide from the poll tax in the council, either by not registering or not paying, while the payment rates for the council tax are also good. We should not give the impression made through rose tinted spectacles that the electorate in Derbyshire Dales are perfect democratic specimens, but the factors outlined above may be influential in determining the high rate of turnout in the local authority.

Two final factors found by our research to be important in the district are the impact of local issues and the role of the local press. Section 9.4 showed that local issues can be very important in deciding the level of voter interest in a local election, and Derbyshire Dales is no different from this conclusion. 'Big' local issues such as new homes for the elderly and a new sports hall can dominate the local political agenda. The area is described as being a dynamic community that are always interested in these sort of issues. One councillor put the case very bluntly, he suggested that if a councillor is seen to make a mess of a local issue, then the public will turn out in droves to vote against this councillor at the next election. He went on to say that the electorate are normally successful in achieving their aim of replacing the councillor.

A contributory factor in informing the public about local issues, and perhaps indirectly getting them to participate in elections are the local media. The local press in the district is said to be widely read. The Ashbourne News Telegraph (known locally as 'The Stunner' because of the alleged lies that it tells!) sends reporters to council meetings, reports meetings verbatim, questions councillors and reports on local council campaigns. An example of such

a campaign was their front page story on the local lottery which aimed to raise funds for the sports hall. The Matlock Mercury also gives news of council activity. Overall, there is a cohesive press coverage of the council's work, which it is believed greatly influences some of the electorate to vote in the local election.

Our final area of inquiry into the level of turnout in Derbyshire Dales is to examine the political background of the contests to the council. Is there anything special about the elections which makes more people than average go to the polls? All three major parties compete in the area, but not all of them are present in every contest. This is because the parties target particular wards. When the Labour party target a ward, the whole area is canvassed, the polling station is staffed for the entire day and local members 'knock-up' their potential supporters from around 5 p.m. onwards. Leaflets are produced throughout the year and distributed to all households in the ward. The party design their own leaflets which discuss local issues of concern. The respondent from the local Labour party suggested that a national leaflet would probably be thrown away by the electorate in this area because of distrust of the big party political game. Derbyshire Dales is like a number of local authorities, however, because all parties have organisational problems which include having difficulty finding candidates to stand. In the recent 1995 district elections, two wards in the district were won by the Conservatives unopposed (Doveridge and Norbury), and the Wirksworth ward was unopposed for the three Labour candidates. It is also very difficult in sparsely populated communities, like the ones in this district, to canvass the electorate.

So, does the political competition and organisation have any impact on the level of turnout in this district? Our respondents from the political parties believed that the impact of party political activity is greatly exaggerated. The local councillors believe that previous marginality for example, does not really have any effect because people do not know about the previous situation in the ward or council. People are generally ignorant about local government which results in the electorate blaming the Town Council for everything. Of course, electoral organisation must have some role to play, otherwise why do parties in this

district and across the country do whatever they can to canvass an area? The overall view from Derbyshire Dales was that the parties can not take the credit for the high levels of turnout in the council. If they carried out no canvassing in some wards, they would still receive a high turnout. Perhaps, the political parties are more important in explaining high levels of turnout in one-off cases rather than in local authorities with histories of high turnout.

We noticed when examining the residual turnout wards in Chapter 8 that the existence of an active Parish Council may positively influence the turnout rate in a local authority. Derbyshire Dales continues this pattern as the area is fully parished. Meetings are held in nearly all villages and they are reasonably well attended. Parish Councils get people involved in their area and where a strong network of councils exist, it is likely that the turnout in elections will be high. The parishes in this district are described as being a focus for the area, they are actively doing things which although may upset some people, has the effect of getting people interested in local affairs. There is, however, a dismal level of turnout when the Parish Council elections are held on their own. This comment raises two points. The first is that people are actually competing in a parish election unlike in other districts where parish councillors are often returned unopposed. Secondly, despite the earlier comment that the electorate blame the Town Council for everything, it is likely that the electorate realise that the district council is a more powerful body than the Parish Councils, and so vote in these elections rather than at the parish level.

The final political factor which can influence the level of turnout is the personality of the candidates. We would expect most people to vote according to their party political preferences, however, the personality of a candidate may be more influential than the political party they represent. A turnout of 61% was produced in the Ashford and Longstone ward in 1995. This ward contains two villages that have strong identities, but local feeling was that the turnout in the two party contest was due to the quality of the candidates. The incumbent won again in the ward. She is described by her opponents as

being a popular hard working councillor who pushes for everything in the interests of the ward. It was suggested that the issue of personality was so important in some wards, a candidate could change their political allegiance and still get elected because of their community identity.

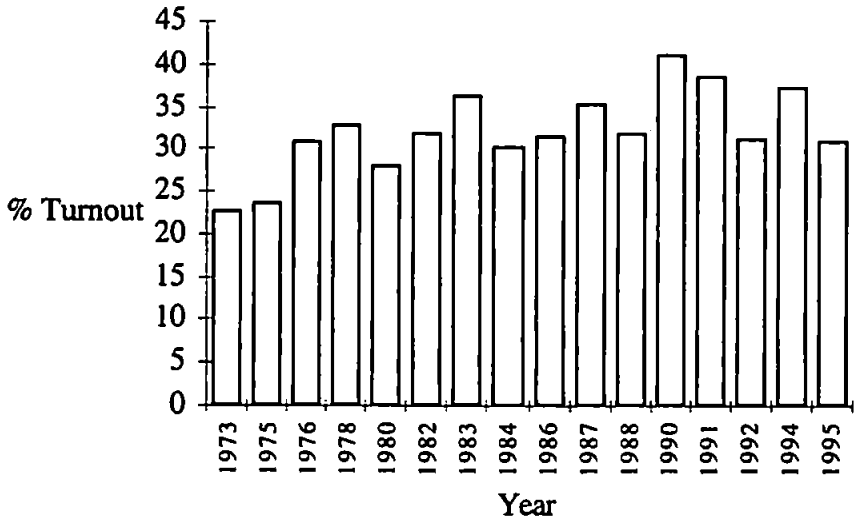
To conclude this case-study, we can say that all the variables discussed in this chapter which included political factors, local issues, the media, geography, polling stations, social factors and other factors that are specific to a district, are all influential in determining the high levels of turnout in Derbyshire Dales. What seemed to be the most compelling determinant of voter participation is not the role of any organisation or political party, but the electorate themselves. Our qualitative research indicates that it is the existence of communities in the district which promotes turnout. This is not a factor that can be taken from one place and deposited in another to increase rates of turnout, because communities take generations to build. Where local authorities can start is by listening to the concerns of the electorate and involving them in the process of local government as much as possible.

9.8: A case-study of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

Sandwell has been mentioned a number of times in this thesis because of its low level of turnout. In Chapter 4, we found that the average turnout in the borough placed it third bottom in the average turnout table of all boroughs over the 21 year period (Table 4.7). It appeared in the bottom ten borough turnout rates in twelve out of the fifteen elections (Table 4.9). In Chapter 5, Sandwell appeared as a residual because of its lower than predicted level of turnout in six out of twelve elections (Table 5.36). In the analysis of metropolitan wards in Chapter 7, Princes End from Sandwell had the lowest ward turnout in eight out of the eleven elections (Table 7.1). Of the 75 low turnout wards in Table 7.4, 37% of them came from Sandwell. Finally, in the residual analysis in Chapter 7, Sandwell produced 8% of the residual wards, all with rates of turnout lower than that expected by the regression equation. These findings from the research and the pattern of low turnout illustrated in Figure 9.2

indicate that the turnout in Sandwell is the polar opposite of the turnout in Derbyshire Dales District Council. What reasons can be suggested by the local registration office and the political parties in the borough to explain this situation?

Figure 9.2: The level of turnout in Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (1973-1995).



The first area of inquiry was to examine the work of the local electoral registration office. Is there anything that the council do or do not do that may affect the level of turnout? The council get a response rate from the registration form (Form A) of 98-99%. This means that they are only missing about 2,000 people from the electoral register. Their system of registration has improved significantly over time. In the past they used a large print out of the old register and placed a tick against each member of the electorate when they were visited by the council and if they returned the Form A. It was a very slow process and there was no way of knowing the percentage return of the registration forms. The introduction of a new computer system has made this process much easier and enables us to conclude that the low rate of turnout in the borough is not the result of an inaccurate register. The local authority are very interested in the register but it seems that this interest does not stretch to the issue of turnout. The elections office did not regard turnout as being part of their job.

A small proportion of the turnout in every election includes votes that are not made at the polling station on election day. The amount of these absent votes (which are made up of postal and proxy votes) depends in part on the role played by the council to advertise their use. Some councils do very little to publicise the absent vote, while other councils run extensive campaigns. Once an absent vote has been applied for, research has shown that turnout among these absent voters is approximately twice the proportion of those who vote in person (Rallings, Thrasher and Downe, 1996). Sandwell are traditionally very low on absent votes compared to neighbouring boroughs such as Dudley. The borough send out an absent voter leaflet to all households in alternate years, and believe that there is a link between the number of absent votes and whether a leaflet was sent out. Unfortunately, the council report that the leaflet is not sent out every year because of financial restrictions. The overriding conclusion from the interviews in the council was that the officers can only do so much. It is their job to produce an accurate register which they do and they advertise the election and the facility of absent voting to the best of their ability, - what else can they do? They suggested that the saying, 'You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink' was apt for the situation in their council.

Interviews were carried out with representatives from the three major parties and these produced valuable information that can help in our explanation of low turnout in the borough. To understand the turnout in Sandwell, we were advised to examine the history behind the formation of the metropolitan borough. Before the Local Government Act of 1972, Rowley, Smethwick and Oldbury made up the county borough of Warley, and Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Tipton made up the county borough of West Bromwich. The act brought these two county boroughs together to form the metropolitan borough of Sandwell. Unlike a metropolitan borough like Birmingham that has kept similar boundaries for quite a long time, there is no such consistency in Sandwell. Even now, more than 25 years later, there is said to be no identity between the old county boroughs. The turnout in the south of the metropolitan borough is relatively stable (wards like Abbey and Rowley), but the turnout to the north of Sandwell, and the north-east especially (wards like Tipton

Green, Great Bridge and Princes End all from Tipton) has traditionally been low and no-one has established why this is the case.

The lower turnout in some wards in Sandwell does not seem to be reflected in different levels of turnout in general elections. The turnout in the West Bromwich West parliamentary constituency which includes the Princes End ward is not significantly different to the level of voter participation in other constituencies in the West Midlands. Of course, this comment disregards the fact that higher levels of turnout would be expected in marginal constituencies such as West Bromwich West and the fact that there was no campaigning in the West Bromwich West constituency in 1997 when Betty Boothroyd was the sitting speaker of the House of Commons. From the evidence of consistent turnout rates between the parliamentary constituencies, it was suggested that the low turnout in certain wards in Sandwell was a local and not a parliamentary phenomenon.

The next line of questioning in the metropolitan borough concerned the intensity of political competition. We were interested in discovering whether the three major parties competed in all wards and what the parties did to get the vote out? Sandwell is a relatively large authority with 24 wards. Although each party would like to give the same attention to each ward, this is not realistic. The compromise position means that, for example, while in some wards the Labour party competes as if it is a general election: they send out a number of leaflets, they knock on doors and canvass, they hold meetings and generally do all the can to generate interest, in other wards, little or no work is done as the candidates assume they will be elected. It was emphasised that this latter situation is not the case in many wards, because even though Labour have been in control of the borough since 1979, candidates in 'safe' Labour wards still do their share of campaigning. Just as we mentioned that there are problems of identity in the borough between old county boroughs, our respondent from the Labour party suggested that the party machine was far more efficient in the south of the borough than the north, and the reasons reflect the borough's past. Although a lot of time and effort is put into the campaign by the Labour party in Sandwell, one response was that if

no campaigning was carried out, it would make very little if any difference to the turnout rate.

It was alleged by the other major parties that the Conservatives are not very well organised in the borough. They were accused by two respondents of not putting up a campaign in the borough for many years. The Conservatives responded by arguing that the local elections in the borough were like mini general elections where the electorate generally cast protest votes against the Conservative government. One Conservative councillor said that he holds surgeries in public places three times a week for people to come to him with any problems he might be able to help with in his role as a councillor, but last week only one person turned up to his three meetings. He argued that people in the area complain about the local council but are completely apathetic about doing anything about it. The majority do not turn out to vote and those who do vote do not base their choice upon local issues. As for the Liberal Democrats, they target a small number of wards in the borough where they have councillors such as Great Barr, Newton and Charlemont. Focus newsletters are delivered every six weeks in these wards throughout the year and the party believe that they are successful in getting their supporters out to vote.

In the case-study of Derbyshire Dales District Council, local issues and the media were mentioned as being two contributory factors of the high level of turnout. How important did our political party respondents believe local issues were in Sandwell, and could they provide any information on the role of the local media? The only local issues that were mentioned as being important in influencing the level of turnout are not specifically 'local' issues, but matters relating to national political consideration. In 1990, the turnout in all wards in Sandwell was higher than normal because of the opposition to the poll tax and in 1992, the turnout was low as the local contests were held soon after the general election. It seems that at election time no local issues dominate the political agenda. There is evidence to suggest, however, that people are not apathetic when there are important new developments proposed in their local area. In 1997, the council held a postal ballot of council tenants asking them if

they were in favour of transferring housing stock to local non-profit making housing companies which have the aim of improving housing conditions in the borough. In Smethwick, the whole ward was balloted and a turnout of 81% was received. On average, the turnout of all the wards was just below 80% with the result of the ballot being a 'No' vote by 60%-40%. This level of turnout is more than double the average rate of turnout received in the borough's local elections. We can infer from these turnout figures that the electorate in the balloted wards in Sandwell believed the election concerning their future landlords was more important than the local elections, or perhaps, there is the case for arguing that postal ballots can increase turnout. Finally, the media show a fair amount of interest in the work of the council. The Express and Star is well read in Sandwell, but our respondent suggested that the sales are noticeably lower in the North West of the borough which includes the low turnout wards of Tipton Green, Great Bridge and Princes End. In addition to the council affairs being discussed in the Express and Star, the borough produce a local authority newspaper, The Sandwell Herald, that is delivered to every household in the borough every quarter.

To conclude this section on Sandwell Metropolitan Borough, we can suggest that the history behind the formation of the borough can help to explain why turnout is low and the fact that Sandwell is safe for the Labour party is another reason for the poor rates of voter participation. There are, however, many other local authorities that are safe Labour councils made up of places or former county boroughs that have no connection between each other, so what is special about Sandwell? The council informed us that there is just very little interest in the borough, but why is this the case? As much as a wide range of reasons are suggested to explain the low rate of turnout in Sandwell, we still struggle to find a satisfactory answer. Our respondents believed that only by carrying out some face to face research in the area, will it be possible to understand the low level of turnout in the borough.

9.9: Conclusions.

We have shown in this chapter that there are many determinants of local election turnout. Some of these are specific to a local area, while others are influential across the whole of local government. This means that it is very difficult for local authorities to know what reasons are significant in affecting the level of turnout in their own area. The view of one local authority was that,

> **'Improvements to polling station locations are cosmetic and will only very marginally improve turnout levels. It is one of public perception of politics and politicians that is at the core of the problem, i.e. trust and conduct. It is also true that as a society we don't engender a feeling of citizenship amongst the general population or in fact pride. Also true is the feeling that 'my one vote will not change anything'**
> (Plymouth City Council).

Another council was not so specific. He believed that the factors that determined the rate of voter participation in his local authority,

> **'can be anything from the national political situation down to the weather on polling day'**
> (East Sussex County Council).

Instead of using the experience, intuition, and guesswork of electoral registration officers in determining why turnout in some local authorities is especially high or low, a small number of local authorities have conducted some research to investigate the reasons for non-voting in their area - Sheffield City Council is one of these local authorities. They sent questionnaires to 2,000 randomly selected names on the electoral register, that included questions designed to find out why some of them had decided not to vote. The results of the survey have been re-produced in Table 9.1:

Table 9.1: Findings from a questionnaire into non-voting in Sheffield.

Reasons for not voting	%
Out of town	19
Results are always the same	16
All political parties are the same	16
Only interested in General Elections	13
Not interested	8
Illness	8
Polling stations too far away	4
Didn't know about the election	3
Other	16

The results given for not voting are in accordance with the variables outlined throughout this qualitative investigation such as political factors, apathy, polling stations etc. Careful consideration should be given to the results of surveys such as this, because the council are in a position to improve the situation. For example, Table 9.1 shows that being 'out of town' is the most popular reason given for not voting in the 1995 local elections in Sheffield. Here, the council can help to alleviate this problem by carrying out absent voter campaigns to enable those that are keen to vote to still have the opportunity to do so. Those who cannot vote because of 'illness' should also be given the same chance to vote by post or by appointing a proxy. Improvements can be made to the electoral process and although it is recognised they may only have a marginal effect, as long as these changes have the potential to enhance levels of local election turnout, they should be encouraged.

We now know that the causes of low turnout are wide and varied. One local authority wrote that,

> **'The reasons for low turnout are more 'macro' than 'micro' reasons'**
> (Stratford-upon-Avon District Council).

There seem to be so many 'micro' determinants of turnout, however, that they make up a significant proportion of the explanation of the variation in turnout. The important point to

conclude from this chapter is that things can be done to improve the situation, if we can disentangle the variables which are important in determining whether people vote in each local authority. Analysing the results of surveys that have been carried out by local authorities like Sheffield is a step in the right direction, as long as this action is followed up with sufficiently funded, and well thought out schemes and initiatives to improve the level of turnout in local government elections.

Chapter 10: Conclusions.

The study of turnout has taken a number of different forms over the last 30 or so years. Chapter 2 revealed that turnout in general elections has been widely studied and cross-national studies at the national level have also been conducted. A wide range of political, structural and socio-economic variables have been tested with respect to turnout at the national level, and conclusions from this research has been discussed in some detail. Turnout has also been examined using survey methods and case-studies at both the national and the local level. Research at the local level has been neglected compared to the research conducted into turnout in general elections. This thesis has aimed to fill a gap in the knowledge of the subject area, by examining turnout in local elections at the aggregate level over a period of more than 20 years. This has included analysis at both the local authority and the ward level. We have studied the effects of a number of independent variables and have carried out a survey and in-depth interviews to provide some qualitative weight to balance the quantitative data analysis.

The starting point of this thesis was to investigate the assumption that turnout in local elections was a uniform 40%. Our analysis has clearly shown that as we moved down the levels of aggregation, the amount of turnout variation increased. Chapter 4 showed that there is a significant amount of variation in the turnout figures in each type of local authority. Taking the London boroughs as an example, there is variation in the rate of turnout according to the election year. Table 10.1 shows that the lowest turnout in an election occurred in 1974 when 33.7% of the electorate in London voted. This compares to the highest election turnout of 46% in 1994. The second area where turnout varies is the average turnout of the boroughs over time. Hackney and Tower Hamlets came bottom of the turnout table with mean borough turnouts of 27.9%. Richmond-upon-Thames produced the highest average turnout of 50.2% over the 30 year period. Thirdly, we can compare the turnout figures in all elections. This shows that Tower Hamlets had the lowest turnout of 11.9% in 1968 and Richmond-upon-Thames had the highest turnout in

any one election when 56.5% of the electorate voted. Finally, we can see even more variation in turnout between wards in London. Over the nine elections between 1964 and 1994, the Liddle ward from Southwark had the lowest turnout of 18% in 1990. The highest ward turnout of 69% was produced by Ickenham (Hillingdon) in 1978 and Churchill (Westminster) in 1990. Table 10.1 shows how the level of turnout varies in the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts as well as in the London boroughs.

Table 10.1: The variation in turnout over time in our data-sets (about here).

Chapter 4 set the scene of the variation in turnout in local government elections. Its aims were three-fold. Firstly, we wanted to examine the average turnout in London, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts in every election. The results showed that turnout is quite consistent over time. The average turnout in any election in the data-base was always between 30-50%. Hence, there is some statistical basis for the reason why the 40% figure is often quoted as the average for local elections. The London boroughs had the most consistent rates of voter participation over time, as the city had the smallest range between their highest and lowest election turnout.

The analysis of turnout figures by election year showed that turnout was highest when local elections received more publicity than usual, because of the proximity of a general election. The elections of 1983, 1987 and 1991 can be used as examples of this point, although the Conservatives decided to call the general election in 1992, and not in 1991. Turnout was also high in the 1990 election, when the opposition to the poll tax was believed to be the reason for provoking more people than usual to turn out at the polls. The low level of turnout in the local elections in 1992 can be partly explained by the general election held a few weeks earlier. Chapter 4 also found that turnout was higher in London and the metropolitan boroughs after the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils respectively. Finally, a pattern was detected of turnout slightly increasing

Table 10.1: The variation in turnout over time in our data-sets.

	Min (Year)	Place	Max (Year)	Place
London boroughs (39%)				
Election turnout	33.7% (1974)		46% (1994)	
Mean borough turnout	27.9%	Hackney, Tower Hamlets	50.2%	Richmond-upon-Thames
Borough turnout	11.9% (1968)	Tower Hamlets	56.5% (1990)	Richmond-upon-Thames
Ward turnout	18% (1990)	Liddle, Southwark	69% (1978)	Ickenham, Hillingdon
			69% (1990)	Churchill, Westminster
Metropolitan boroughs (38.2%)				
Election turnout	30.8% (1973)		47.1% (1990)	
Mean borough turnout	31.5%	Sunderland	46%	Stockport
Borough turnout	21.5% (1975)	Knowsley	57.3% (1990)	Bury
Ward turnout	16% (1984)	Princes End, Sandwell	64% (1987)	Central and Falinge, Rochdale
Shire Districts (40.9%)				
Election turnout	33.3% (1973)		48.8% (1990)	
Mean district turnout	28.5%	Kingston-upon-Hull	51.7%	Rossendale
District turnout	17.1% (1973)	Middlesborough	57.8% (1983)	North Hertfordshire
	17.1% (1973)	Tamworth		
Ward turnout	16.3% (1987)	Queens, Rushmoor	74.1% (1987)	Breadsall and Morley, Erewash
			74.1% (1987)	Wanney, Tynedale

over time. This means that the problem of low turnout in local elections is not a new phenomenon.

The second aim of Chapter 4 was to compare average turnout rates of local authorities over time. The shire districts provided the widest variation - on average, 28.5% of the electorate voted in Kingston-upon-Hull compared to 51.7% in Rossendale. The results of our analysis showed that it was reasonable to expect turnout in Richmond-upon-Thames, Sutton, Stockport, Bury, Rossendale and Exeter to be high in future elections because of their past behaviour. Conversely, low levels of turnout in Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Knowsley, Sunderland, Stoke-on-Trent and Kingston-upon-Hull are also to be expected.

The final objective of Chapter 4 was to examine the turnout rates of local authorities when they were not averaged. The results showed that local authorities on the whole appear to have consistent rates of turnout. Once a local authority has recorded high or low rates of turnout relative to equivalent local authorities, it is likely that they will retain that position in the league of turnout rates. This conclusion was reached by analysing the number of appearances a local authority made at the top and bottom of the turnout table over a number of elections. On the other hand, we also found that local authorities can produce a one-off high turnout as the result of a special local issue. The extraordinary high turnout rates in Westminster and Bradford in the election of 1990, provide us with two notable examples of this occurrence.

We began the investigation of the determinants of these variations in turnout in Chapter 5. The chapter was divided into four main sections for each type of local authority. Firstly, we concentrated on the political and structural variables as determinants of turnout. We suggested a number of hypotheses which we then went on to test. Correlations were then carried out between all the political and structural variables and turnout. The next section examined the role played by the socio-economic variables. The variables measuring types

of housing tenure were split into a number of categories and we compared the turnout figures according to these categories. The third section considered all the independent variables together in a regression analysis. Finally, we analysed the residuals at the local authority level in London, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts.

The first section of Chapter 5 found that the size of borough and average ward electorates in London and the metropolitan boroughs seemed to make no difference to the level of turnout. It was only in the districts that the size of the electorate was found to have any impact on the rate of turnout. Inverse relationships were found between the variables measuring electorate size and the level of turnout. The results showed that turnout was lowest when there were more than 95,000 electors in a district, while having more than 5,000 electors in a ward and an elector:councillor ratio of more than 3,000:1 also produced the smallest rates of turnout. The categories which contained the largest sized electoral units always produced the lowest average turnout figures. The results of the correlations between the variables, ELECT, CRATIO and WRATIO and turnout produced a number of significant correlation coefficients that were negative. We can conclude, therefore, that the larger the district, the bigger the ward and the higher the elector:councillor ratio, the lower the level of turnout.

Another political/structural variable which produced interesting results occurred when the Conservative party were the largest party in the previous election to a London or metropolitan borough. In these boroughs, turnout was five percentage points higher when the largest party in a borough was the Conservatives rather than the Labour party. Boroughs where the Liberal Democrats were the largest party in the previous election and local authorities where two parties had the same number of councillors also had instances of very high levels of turnout. Unfortunately, there were few cases where the Liberal Democrats had the highest number of councillors or when two parties had the same number of members, making generalisations difficult. In the districts, the party label of

the largest group in the previous election did not seem to be an important determinant of turnout.

When correlations were conducted between the political and structural variables and turnout, the only variable that had a consistent effect in all three types of local authorities was NOCOUN - a surrogate indicator of marginality. The results enable us to conclude for the whole of local government, that the larger the number of seats belonging to any major party in a local authority, the greater the chance of a low level of turnout at the next election.

The second section of Chapter 5 concerned the socio-economic variables as determinants of local election turnout. We concentrated on examining the bivariate relationship between the type of housing in a local authority and turnout. The results showed that the greater the proportion of owner occupiers in a local authority, the higher the level of turnout. The relationship was reversed for the variable that measured the extent of council housing in a local authority. These results were supported by finding significant correlation coefficients in London and the metropolitan boroughs. The relationships between the housing variables and turnout were much weaker in the districts and only a small number of significant correlation coefficients were found. The only socio-economic variable that produced large significant coefficients in all three types of local authority was the proportion of unemployment. This variable was negatively related to turnout, the higher the level of unemployment, the lower the level of turnout. The results from the analysis of the census derived variables allows us to suggest that local authorities that are composed of a high proportion of council housing and high levels of unemployment, will be likely to be places where the level of voter participation is poor. An assertion like this disregards the fact that these variables may only be influential when the different types of independent variables are considered separately. To see which variables are important when all the independent variables are included in an analysis together, we used multivariate analysis.

The results of the regression analysis form the third section of Chapter 5. The stepwise option was used so that the variable with the strongest correlation with turnout was the first variable to enter into the regression equation. Three variables, the largest group of councillors, the extent of council housing and the rate of unemployment, provide most of the explanation for turnout to vary between local authorities. The influence of some of the variables were not consistent across local government. For example, the variables measuring the average size of the electorate in wards, the elector:councillor ratio and the elector:ward ratio were found only to be influential in the districts.

The final part of Chapter 5 examined the residuals in London, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts. The results showed that a number of local authorities appeared as residuals in more than one election. The level of turnout in Richmond-upon-Thames, Greenwich and Wandsworth was higher than the regression equation predicted in three or more London borough elections. Similarly, the turnout in Barking and Dagenham, Kensington and Chelsea and Newham was lower than expected in at least three elections. In the metropolitan boroughs, the most 'deviant' boroughs were Bury, Stockport, Trafford, Wakefield and Wolverhampton which were positive residuals and Sefton, Sandwell, Coventry, Solihull and Sunderland which were negative residuals in at least five elections out of twelve. Finally, the districts that produced levels of turnout which the regression equation failed to predict were Derbyshire Dales, Gedling, Rossendale, Welwyn Hatfield and North Hertfordshire which had unexpectedly high rates of turnout and Holderness, Hartlepool, Penwith and West Lindsey which were negative residuals.

The analysis in Chapter 5 was used as a template for the ward level analysis of London, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts in Chapter's 6, 7 and 8. The literature on turnout at the ward level is very small, consisting mainly of an article by Rallings and Thrasher (1990) and a number of case-studies of particular cities (e.g. Davies and Newton, 1974). The paucity of research of turnout at the ward level merited the separation of the

ward level analysis into three chapters. A summary of the conclusions drawn from these chapters is illustrated in Table 10.2.

Table 10.2: The determinants of turnout at the ward level in local elections (about here).

Chapter 6 began by setting the scene of the turnout variation in London wards. We examined the highest and lowest ward turnouts in each election and explored the variation in turnout between wards within boroughs. We began the bivariate analysis of turnout by testing the relationship between turnout and single-member wards. We found that over the five elections, turnout was, on average more than five percentage points higher in single-member wards than in wards represented by two or more councillors. The number of vacancies in a ward is a variable that could possibly be altered by the government. Changes may be made to the boundaries, or to the structure of councillors representing wards. For example, multi-member wards could be split up into smaller sized wards each being represented by a single councillor. No extra councillors would be needed and the effect of this change could be a higher rate of turnout if it led the electorate to feel that their vote is now more likely to have some influence on the outcome. The other structural variables such as the size of the electorate in wards and the elector:councillor ratio did not seem to have any influence on the level of turnout.

We began the analysis of political variables in Chapter 6 by studying the topic of party competition. This can be measured by a number of variables, for example, the amount of canvassing that takes place in an area (Denver and Hands, 1971, Pimlott, 1973) and money spent on campaigns (Taylor, 1972). For this thesis, we needed variables that could be simply defined and which had an identifiable value in every local authority and ward. There seemed to be no easy way of making canvassing quantifiable for inclusion in the data-base, while the level of finances are not believed to be as influential in local elections as they are in general elections. One of the variables we used to measure party competition was the number of major parties competing in a ward. The results showed

Table 10.2: The determinants of turnout at the ward level in local elections.

	London wards	Metropolitan wards	District wards
Correlations	Conservative share of the vote (+ve)	Conservative share of the vote (+ve)	Size of electorate (-ve)
	Lib Dem share of the vote (+ve)	Lib Dem share of the vote (+ve)	Labour share of the vote (-ve)
	Labour share of the vote (-ve)	Labour share of the vote (-ve)	Number of vacancies (-ve)
	Number of major parties (+ve)	Number of major parties (+ve)	Council housing (-ve)
	Previous marginality (-ve)	Previous marginality (-ve)	Migration (-ve)
	Population density (-ve)	Council housing (-ve)	No access to a car (-ve)
	Council housing (-ve)	No access to a car (-ve)	Population density (-ve)
	No access to a car (-ve)	Overcrowding housing (-ve)	SEG3M, SEG4, SEG5 (-ve)
	Overcrowding housing (-ve)	Owner occupiers (+ve)	Unemployment (-ve)
	Owner occupiers (+ve)	All Socio-Economic Groupings	Youth (-ve)
	Unemployment (-ve)	Unemployment (-ve)	
Multivariate	Previous marginality (-ve)	Labour share of the vote (-ve)	Size of electorate (-ve)
	Size of electorate (-ve)	Previous marginality (-ve)	Number of candidates (+ve)
	Owner occupiers (+ve)	Size of electorate (-ve)	Number of vacancies (-ve)
	Unemployment (-ve)	Migration (-ve)	SEG3M (-ve)
		SEG3M (-ve)	Unemployment (-ve)
		Unemployment (-ve)	Youth (-ve)

that turnout was more than ten percentage points higher in three party contests than when only one major party competed in a London ward.

Whilst at the local authority level we measured party competition by examining which party was the largest according to the number of council seats, at the ward level, we used the percentage share of the vote for each major party. The results in London showed that the higher the share of the vote for the Labour party once they received more than 50% of the vote, the lower the level of turnout. For example, when the Labour share of the vote was between 50-60% in a ward, the average turnout was 42.5%. When the party received more than eight votes out of ten in a ward, the average turnout was only 32.9%. Hence, in wards where there was little doubt that Labour would win, a large proportion of supporters of the opposition abstained from voting. A similar, although not such a strong relationship was found between turnout and the Conservative share of the vote, but the turnout figures were about five percentage points higher in each category of the variable compared to the figures for the Labour share of the vote. In the wards where the vote for the Liberal Democrats was over 50%, the turnout rate was higher than that for the other major parties. Perhaps, this was a result of the targeting of winnable wards and canvassing that the Liberal Democrats conduct.

The only other political variable that seemed to be related to turnout was that measuring previous marginality. The results showed that there was a negative relationship between the closeness of the previous ward contest and the level of turnout in the following election. The safer the ward at the last election, a lead over the second placed candidate of more than 35 percentage points was defined as being 'very safe', the lower the level of turnout. This variable produced significant correlation coefficients with the dependent variable and also entered into a number of regression equations.

The census variables that produced significant results at the local authority level continued to be influential at the ward level. The variables, SEG3M, SEG4, SEG5, the level of

council housing, the level of unemployment, the amount of overcrowding and the proportion of the population having no access to a car, all had negative correlations with turnout. As variables such as overcrowding and having no access to a car are surrogate indicators of income levels in a ward, we can infer from the results that the less affluent a London ward, the lower the level of turnout.

Finally in Chapter 6, the regression analysis produced an r^2 greater than 50% in every election, reaching a peak of 64% in 1982. The results of the regression suggested that the three types of independent variables were all important in helping to explain the variation in turnout. The level of unemployment, owner occupiers, and the closeness of the previous contest seem to be the best explanatory variables. As was expected, the majority of the residual wards belonged to the boroughs that were found to be residual in Chapter 5. We focused upon the most 'deviant' residual in each election and managed to interpret the behaviour of some of the wards with reference to the local issues surrounding the election and the political background to the contests. Similar qualitative methods were used to explain the wards with especially low levels of turnout but with less success. Finally, we examined the wards that appeared as residuals in more than one election. Once again, interviews with councillors and officers helped in our explanation behind the behaviour of a residual ward.

The variation in turnout in the metropolitan wards was analysed in Chapter 7. On the whole, similar patterns were found here as were discovered in London. For example, a large amount of variation in turnout figures were found at the ward level, between a low of 16% to a high of 64%. Wards with especially high or low levels of turnout were inevitably grouped in those metropolitan boroughs that were at the ends of the turnout table in Chapter 4.

The first hypothesis we tested was the relationship between the size of the electorate in wards and turnout. As in London, the results showed that there seemed to be no

relationship between the variables. The same set of hypotheses that were tested in the London wards using a number of political variables were examined next in the metropolitan wards. The results showed that the number of major parties in a ward continued to be important. On average, turnout was more than eight percentage points higher when three parties contested a ward rather than when only one major party competed. Another variable that came under the topic of party competition was the share of the vote for the three major parties. The results showed a negative relationship between the Labour party share of the vote in a ward and turnout once they had received more than 50% of the vote. Perhaps, if we had a system of electing a councillor where every vote counted towards the eventual outcome, then we would not find a lower percentage of people turning out to vote in a ward regarded as being safe for Labour. This party political variable continued to be important when the correlations were carried out, producing coefficients ranging between -.51 and -.78. We can infer from this that the higher the share of the vote for the Labour party in a ward, the lower the level of turnout. There seemed to be no relationship between turnout and the share of the vote for the two other major parties, although the level of turnout increased by a small margin as the Liberal Democrats received a higher share of the vote in a ward.

The only other political variable which showed some relationship to the level of turnout was previous marginality. Turnout was more than eight percentage points higher when the previous contest was 'very marginal' (less than five percentage points difference between the parties in the previous contest), compared to when the wards were defined as being 'very safe' (more than 35% difference). The variable measuring previous marginality also produced a number of significant correlations with the turnout variable.

The correlations between turnout and the socio-economic variables produced a number of significant coefficients. As in the London wards, wards with a high proportion of people classed in the SEG1, SEG2, SEG3N and those who are owner occupiers all showed significant positive relationships with the dependent variable. Hence, in wards where the

values for these variables are high - affluent wards - the level of turnout is also expected to be high.

In the regression analysis both sets of variables, the political/structural and the socio-economic, produced higher r^2 figures than they did in the equivalent analysis of London wards. When all the independent variables were considered together in a regression analysis, the r^2 figures explained more than three quarters of the variation in turnout which was an impressive result. Hence, the patterns of party competition and the socio-economic composition of metropolitan wards means that we would be able to forecast future levels of turnout with some degree of confidence.

The final part of Chapter 7 consisted of the residual analysis of metropolitan wards. The results showed that nearly all metropolitan boroughs produced at least one residual ward. A large number of wards made more than one appearance as a residual, which signifies that once a ward produces a rate of turnout that the regression equation can not predict, it is likely that the ward will appear a number of times as a residual. Potential explanations for the behaviour of a couple of residuals are given in some detail within the chapter. We can conclude from the qualitative investigations that it is often special local issues, combined with the social and cultural features of the ward which produces the exceptional rates of turnout. These factors are usually specific to a particular ward, but some similarities between the residual wards have been noted. These factors include the location of the ward, having a strong parish council and the existence of some sort of 'community' in the ward.

The analysis of turnout variation in the district wards appeared in Chapter 8. We expected to find quite different results in this chapter than were found in London and the metropolitan boroughs, because of the different political histories, the structure and the socio-economic composition of wards in the shire districts. For instance, these differences include the fact that there are fewer districts controlled by Labour than there are in the

other types of local authorities. Hence, we would not expect the political variables to be as influential in the districts as they have been in previous analyses. Following the pattern of analysis set out in the two previous ward level chapters, we began by investigating the high and low turnout wards and the variation in turnout between wards in the shire districts. We found a very large amount of dispersion in the turnout rates. The ward with the lowest turnout had only 16.3% of the electorate voting in the 1987 election, while the highest ward turnout was 74.1%, also from the 1987 election.

The testing of relationships between the independent variables and turnout began with the structural variables. We found that, on average, turnout was four percentage points higher in single-member wards than in multi-member wards. Not only are single-member wards important in determining the level of turnout, but the size of the electorate in district wards also seemed to be an influential variable. It was not too surprising to find that the size of the electorate was only important in the districts, because there are great differences in the sizes of wards in the shires, unlike London. Our statistical analysis shows that the average level of turnout is at its greatest in district wards which contain less than 1,200 electors. There is only one ward in London that has a smaller electorate and there are no wards in the metropolitan boroughs that are this small.

Another important difference between the previous ward level analyses and the results in this chapter was that there seemed to be less politicisation in the districts, as more than 10% of wards had only one major party contesting the election. No relationship was found between the number of major parties in a ward contest and the level of turnout. The results also showed that the level of turnout was consistent according to the party share of the vote in wards where any major party received more than the majority of the vote. The rate of voter participation did not decline in line with the increasing dominance of a party in a ward, like it did in London and the metropolitan boroughs. Finally, the closeness of the previous ward contest seemed to have no influence on the level of turnout. The weak correlations produced between all the political variables and turnout supported the earlier

bivariate analyses. It is difficult to explain these results in the districts, perhaps it is just heterogeneity.

The results of the correlations between the socio-economic variables and turnout showed that all the signs of the coefficients were in the same direction as they were in the previous ward analyses, but there are a couple of exceptions. While the variables measuring the proportion of people who live in council housing, the number of migrants in a ward, the percentage of the population with no access to a car, overcrowding, unemployment and those in SEG3M, SEG4 and SEG5 showed negative correlation coefficients, the correlations between SEG1, SEG2 and SEG3N and turnout were also negative in direction when they were positive in London and the metropolitan wards. It seems as if the socio-economic groupings are not as important in determining the level of turnout in the districts than elsewhere in local government. Positive coefficients were produced between the proportion of people in a ward who are employed in the agriculture industry and turnout. So, the more people that are employed in agriculture, the more rural the area and the higher the resulting level of turnout. Generally, the correlation coefficients were weaker in the districts than in the more urban areas in London and the metropolitan boroughs. Utilising the same sets of variables in the three different types of local authorities has been useful, because it has enabled us to see which variables seem to be important and where they are influential.

The regression analysis using the political/structural and the socio-economic variables on their own, produced quite small values of r^2 with the best result of 28% being produced for both sets of variables. Using all the independent variables together in the regression resulted in the r^2 nearly reaching 40%. The analysis of the variables that entered into the regression equation suggests that the political variables are not as influential in the district wards than in the ward level analysis in London and the metropolitan boroughs. This is likely to be the result of the districts being less party political than elsewhere in local government. In the districts, there are still a relatively large number of Independent

councillors and wards that are uncontested. It is much harder for the regression equations to explain behaviour in the disparate districts, because wards can differ in their political, structural and socio-economic make-up much more than the wards in London and the metropolitan boroughs. There are also many more cases of wards in the districts, which can partly explain the high number of residuals that were found. It is easier for wards in the districts to become residuals, because a local issue can have a dramatic effect on everyone who lives in a small ward, rather than just having an effect on a small proportion of people in a larger sized ward. It is also easier for parties to canvass and target wards that are smaller in size. If the parties are successful in their campaigning, then what is seen to be a 'rogue' turnout figure can be explained by focusing on that particular ward.

Our research has shown that the political, structural and socio-economic variables have largely been successful in explaining a majority of the variation in turnout at the local authority and the ward level. These three groupings of variables can not cover every possible determinant of turnout. As a result, there are many explanatory variables that are not presently incorporated in the regression equations. If we asked the 'man on the street' what determines the level of voter turnout in English local government elections, one of the most popular responses would probably be 'the weather'. Part of the cost-benefit analysis when a person decides whether or not to leave the house to vote, is thought to involve the chance of getting wet on the way to the polling station. Of course, if this is the only reason in the mind of a potential voter, then why is the turnout in general elections more than 30 percentage points higher than in local elections? It would be too much of a coincidence for the weather to always be poor on the first Thursday in May. What this seemingly irrelevant and non-academic point of the weather brings up is that the issue of local election turnout is a problematic area of research. There are a large number of variables that could feasibly cause voter participation rates to vary between local authorities and wards. These other variables, which include factors found in the qualitative analysis of the residual wards and in Chapter 9 can also legitimately include the weather. The view of the weather as important is not just confined to the 'man on the

street', as a number of electoral registration officers also mentioned this as a contributory factor, and these people are in a good position to judge if such a variable is a valid factor.

Because the regression equations fail to explain all of the variation in turnout, there are a number of residual local authorities and wards in this analysis. The analysis of residuals was the most interesting part of the thesis for the author. Previous analysis of turnout at the local authority level had concluded that although models of turnout can explain a proportion of turnout and predict turnout rates in future elections, the reasons why certain places featured as residuals a number of times was left unanswered. It was always beyond the scope of the analysis in every study (e.g. Rallings and Thrasher, 1994). A cynic might suggest that because the explanation of the residuals is the hardest and most time consuming task of the research process, that is why there has not been too much focus upon their behaviour. Local authorities and wards are by their very nature going to be different in some respect. They can vary according to many different factors, including their political history, their structure, their social composition, local culture, local issues and quality of candidates. Not all of these variables can be included in a statistical analysis, because how do we measure, for example, a local culture in the social sciences. It is impossible for a regression to explain the behaviour of so many different places as if they are one. Some places are not going to fit into the explanation which is successful for most cases.

It is logical to examine those places that are furthest from the line of best fit and attempt to explain the reasons for this result. We should not be satisfied with a high r^2 and congratulate ourselves with the successful explanation of the turnout variation in the majority of wards. Generally, there are two types of residual local authorities and wards. Some appear just once, while others are persistent residuals which appear in a number of elections.

Both local authorities and wards have shown that they have the potential to improve their level of turnout over time. Of course, there is also the possibility for the turnout in a place to deteriorate between elections. We have indicated throughout the thesis that a very large number of residuals appear on only one occasion. As an example, a ward with an average level of turnout can be propelled into being a high turnout residual by the impact of a local issue. It is very unlikely that there will always be a salient local issue that is prominent at election time, so there must be something special about a local authority or ward which makes it a residual at a number of elections.

The thesis has shown that there are vast variations in the level of local election turnout, but the analysis has also shown that average turnout on the whole remains relatively consistent. It is likely, therefore, that once a local authority or ward becomes a residual, either with a level of turnout higher or lower than that predicted by the regression equations, it will continue to hold this position over time. When we discussed the average turnout figures at the local authority level in Chapter 4, we noted that certain boroughs/districts were likely to produce high or low levels of turnout. The analysis of residuals now provides us with evidence to show that certain local authorities either over-perform or under-perform a number of times and we can expect this behaviour to be repeated in future elections. This means that Richmond-upon-Thames, Greenwich, Bury, Stockport, Rossendale and Derbyshire Dales are more likely to reveal higher rates of turnout than expected, while Barking and Dagenham, Kensington and Chelsea, Sefton, Sandwell, Hartlepool and Holderness will be likely to produce lower than expected rates. These local authorities are not necessarily those that have the highest and the lowest levels of turnout, but are local authorities which appear as residuals the most number of times in London, the metropolitan boroughs and the shire districts. The only way of finding an explanation as to why the turnout in a place is consistently 'deviant', is to concentrate on each individual local authority/ward and interview people with knowledge of the political background to the election results, and the social composition of the area. We have shown in the ward level chapters that although this type of investigation has been carried out a

number of times, there are still occasions where we are not able to suggest any reasons for the behaviour of an electoral unit. Social science is an inexact science, so we should not necessarily be disappointed with an incomplete explanation.

Turnout is a fluid concept where in theory any local authority or ward can have the highest turnout in one election and the lowest in the next, or vice versa. Although it is likely for turnout to remain at a consistent level over time, it is possible for a local authority to take steps to improve their level of turnout and move up the league of turnout rates. To use an analogy of a football club, they may need a multi-million pound injection to improve their performance and move up the league, but great things can come from small beginnings in local authorities. Schemes to improve the level of turnout are being carried out by some local authorities that are not too costly and other councils should take note of this 'good practice' to move up the turnout league.

Chapter 9 was partly based upon the results of a survey that asked local authorities to suggest reasons for their level of turnout. Questions focused on a number of independent variables that were found to be important from our aggregate data analysis. Electoral registration officers were asked about the influence of political variables in determining the level of turnout in their local authority. A number of respondents suggested that turnout was high in their local authority because of the marginality of the contest - the safer the election for any party, the lower the level of turnout. There was also the general belief that the more campaigning that parties carry out, the higher the resulting rate of turnout. Other respondents believed that the method of holding an election (all-out versus thirds) was an influential factor, but both types of local authorities thought that their method of electing representatives positively influenced the rate of turnout. Finally, party competition and the quality of the candidates standing for election were also mentioned as being important determinants of turnout in local elections. All this information is useful because it adds weight to the findings from the data analysis.

Not only were some political variables suggested to be important by our respondents in determining the level of turnout, but a number of electoral registration officers believed that the socio-economic make-up of an area was influential. Wards that were described as being well-off will generally produce the highest rates of turnout in a local authority. This finding is in line with previous research into turnout at national elections. It is difficult to define a well-off ward, but a number of census variables such as housing tenure, socio-economic groupings and unemployment indicate the level of a ward's prosperity. The results in this thesis at both the local authority and the ward level support the qualitative judgements from our respondents.

A number of respondents from our survey suggested that local elections do have a local content and gave examples of local issues that were prominent at election time and influenced the level of turnout. Every local authority or ward has the potential to be affected by a local issue. In local authorities where there is no overall control, a local issue in a ward and the party response to the issue can quite easily influence the result of this ward election and overall tilt the balance of the council one way. It was not surprising to find our respondents suggesting that local issues are important in an attempt to explain high levels of turnout. A local issue may not be in the mind of many voters, but it is a comforting thought for local government officers to think that a local issue may determine the result of a local election. If they are correct in believing that local issues are influential, however, and the evidence seems to be overwhelming, it indicates that local elections are important for local democracy, and local issues might be able to explain a proportion of our residual turnout wards.

The final part of Chapter 9 used two case-studies of a high and a low turnout local authority to see if we could explain the behaviour of the two electorates. The councils chosen were Derbyshire Dales District Council and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. We examined three main factors in Derbyshire Dales. These were the role of the council, social/cultural reasons for the high level of turnout and political reasons for the

behaviour of the electorate. Our conclusions were that the electoral registration office in the council were doing an efficient job and they were helped enormously by a responsible and interested electorate. Secondly, evidence from the interviews suggested that the role of 'community' in the area was an important determinant of turnout. A number of wards had their own special identity and this helped to get people to the polls. Finally, although arguments were put forward to suggest that political factors have some importance in determining the high turnout, the most salient point came from the respondent who argued that without any party campaigning or canvassing, turnout would still likely be high in the council. We can conclude from this case-study that local issues, the role of the press, strong parish councils and the existence of a number of close-knit communities were the dominant factors behind the high rate of turnout in the district. Variables such as these are often ignored, because if they can not be put into a statistical analysis, they are often excluded from the research. The reader of the research findings would thereby be left with the impression that these type of variables are not important. This thesis has demonstrated that statistical analysis can reveal some of the picture and qualitative research is vital to give a rounded view on why turnout varies in local elections.

In Sandwell, we investigated the same three areas of interest studied in Derbyshire Dales. The council believed that they could only do so much to get people out to vote. Their task is to produce an accurate register; improving the rate of turnout is a job for the political parties. The interviews of councillors and officers in the borough showed that the history of the formation of the borough could be a reason for the low level of turnout. It was suggested that there is no identification between the old county boroughs which now form the metropolitan borough and this results in low levels of turnout in local elections. Finally, from a political perspective, the main reason given for the low turnout is the domination of the council by the Labour party. It was suggested that the Conservatives were not very well organised in the borough and the Liberal Democrats only target a small number of seats. Although the role of the council, social/cultural and political reasons provide some of the explanation for the low level of turnout, it does not provide a full

explanation of the behaviour of the electorate. We can really only find out more information by carrying out a survey of the electorate in Sandwell.

Nothing can be done to change the history of an area or the political contests that have taken place. Little can be done to alter the structure of wards in a local authority or to improve the social composition of an area. What can be done to improve the level of turnout, would be for local authorities to carry out schemes and initiatives to improve the registration process and also to advertise the election in new and interesting ways. It is likely that the only way to increase the level of turnout by more than a few percentage points, however, is if changes are made to the current legislation. One such change that may increase local election turnout is to introduce some sort of proportional representation. This would make every vote count and electors would not feel that their vote is wasted in wards and/or local authorities where one party is dominant. If changes are going to be made to the existing electoral procedures, then it is more likely to happen now with a new government than ever before. At the time of writing, the government are about to produce a consultation paper on local election reforms. Ideas for change include improving the facility of absent voting and having electronic voting. If these suggestions were enacted then local election turnout may increase. Labour have also announced that they intend to use proportional representation for the European Elections in 1999. Using the same method of voting for local elections is now one step nearer. The evaluation of the effect this change would have on the level of turnout would probably form a Ph.D. on its own.

For now, we can argue that the level of turnout in local elections is an indication of the health of local democracy. This thesis has consisted of a check-up of local democracy and has found that although the patient is in working order, some may diagnose her as being sick but getting slightly better. Medication can been provided by local authorities to improve health, but radical government prescribed treatment is necessary in order for English local democracy to feel as fit as our European neighbours.

Appendix 1.

A methodological note on the algorithm used to calculate turnout in multi-member wards.

The issue concerning how to calculate total vote in multi-member wards when the number of valid ballot papers has not been noted is a serious one. The problem affects election returns from London boroughs since 1964 and shire districts from 1973. The algorithm used in this research calculates total vote in the following way - from this total vote figure we can calculate turnout.

In a ward that elects three councillors and which has three candidates standing for each of the three main parties, the algorithm will average the votes for the three Labour candidates and take this average to be the vote for the Labour party. The algorithm performs in the same way for the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats. Where the major parties do not put forward their full slate of candidates, the algorithm uses the smallest slate to work out the total vote. So, if the Liberal Democrats field two candidates to three each from Labour and the Conservatives, then we take an average of the votes for the Liberal Democrats and the top two votes for the candidates from Labour and the Conservative party. These averages are then used to calculate total vote. When a major party only has one candidate in a ward, then the highest vote for the candidate of the three major parties is used to calculate total vote.

Candidates that stand for election who do not belong to a major party are not ignored by the algorithm because these candidates are an important part of local elections. The algorithm groups the Independent candidates according to the number of seats available in a multi-member ward. For example, in a ward electing three councillors where six Independent candidates are standing, we take the vote of the first placed candidate and the fourth placed candidate to calculate total vote. When the number of Independent candidates is less than the number of seats, then an average of the Independent vote is taken.

The calculation of the total vote where minor parties compete is different to that of the Independent candidates. If a minor party does not field a complete slate and their number of candidates is less than that of the smallest major party, then the minor party vote is averaged on the basis of the size of its incomplete slate. In a ward where there are two Green candidates and one Resident Association candidate and where the smallest major party slate is three, then we average the Green party vote and take the vote of the Resident Association candidate to help in calculating total vote.

Since my research was undertaken, there has been further detailed research on methods to calculate total vote in multi-member wards. Gunter, Rallings and Thrasher (**1**) test nine different algorithms for estimating total vote which include the one used in this research. They conclude that, '...none of the algorithms clearly stands out from the rest as the best estimator'. It is important to be aware of this research and also for future research to keep abreast of developments in this area as the best estimation of total vote is vital for the study of turnout in local elections.

Reference:

1 Gunter, C., Rallings, C. and Thrasher, M. Calculating total vote where district magnitude is greater than one : A test of some algorithms using British local election data. Journal of Applied Statistics (forthcoming).

Appendix 2.

London boroughs ranked according to their turnout rate in each election between 1964-1994.

London Borough	1964	1968	1971	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	Average position
Barking and Dagenham	25	27	27	29	30	31	32	30	31	29
Barnet	6	1	23	14	16	21	25	15	21	16
Bexley	2	2	2	7	10	14	18	14	11	9
Brent	16	17	17	21	7	12	21	27	10	16
Bromley	1	3	8	5	9	7	11	11	12	7
Camden	18	21	19	16	17	13	14	22	22	18
Croydon	15	18	21	12	22	22	24	21	20	19
Ealing	5	7	4	10	12	3	9	16	8	8
Enfield	12	4	13	11	14	19	17	19	17	14
Greenwich	17	15	5	19	15	16	2	10	14	13
Hackney	31	29	30	30	27	30	30	32	28	30
Hammersmith and Fulham	22	14	1	8	4	5	6	5	15	9
Haringey	21	23	20	24	21	15	7	25	16	19
Harrow	9	8	12	3	5	4	15	9	9	8
Havering	13	10	9	13	18	18	22	13	19	15
Hillingdon	11	6	6	6	2	6	12	6	5	7
Hounslow	3	5	3	15	6	11	10	18	18	10
Islington	30	30	25	28	24	25	13	24	23	25
Kensington and Chelsea	28	28	31	25	28	26	28	28	30	28
Kingston-upon-Thames	10	11	10	4	11	10	4	2	3	7
Lambeth	27	24	22	26	25	20	16	23	26	23
Lewisham	20	19	11	18	20	24	19	26	27	20
Merton	8	13	14	9	8	9	8	7	4	9
Newham	24	26	29	31	31	32	31	31	29	29
Redbridge	14	20	24	17	19	17	23	17	13	18
Richmond-upon-Thames	4	9	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	3
Southwark	29	31	28	27	29	29	26	29	32	29
Sutton	7	12	16	2	3	2	5	4	7	6
Tower Hamlets	32	32	32	32	32	28	29	20	2	27
Waltham Forest	23	16	18	23	23	23	20	12	24	20
Wandsworth	19	22	15	20	13	8	3	3	6	12
Westminster	26	25	26	22	26	27	27	8	25	24

Appendix 3.

Metropolitan boroughs ranked according to their turnout rate in each election between 1973-1994.

Metropolitan Boroughs	1973	1975	1976	1978	1980	1982	1983	1984	1986	1987	1988	1990	1991	1992	1994	Average position
Barnsley	19	18	17	15	15	25	27	17	31	30	31	36	31	33	20	24
Birmingham	26	23	20	29	27	21	11	10	18	19	19	19	17	14	10	19
Bolton	9	10	16	17	5	17	8	18	15	14	14	5	12	13	11	12
Bradford	7	13	12	11	7	8	5	8	8	8	7	3	11	8	8	8
Bury	5	3	6	7	3	4	3	3	1	2	2	1	3	1	2	3
Calderdale	4	6	2	2	4	5	9	7	10	12	12	8	8	7	7	7
Coventry	8	5	3	6	20	23	21	28	26	21	30	30	23	25	28	20
Doncaster	10	14	10	8	14	22	29	21	27	23	22	31	30	30	31	21
Dudley	21	21	30	31	30	31	25	24	21	27	20	18	21	17	14	23
Gateshead	25	26	13	19	23	33	31	32	23	29	25	24	24	26	23	25
Kirklees	3	4	4	9	6	19	14	5	3	5	10	9	6	9	4	7
Knowsley	32	36	36	36	35	35	35	25	35	28	34	35	35	31	33	33
Leeds	20	16	18	24	16	18	18	19	14	15	17	10	19	20	21	18
Liverpool	31	30	32	33	29	24	17	1	4	7	9	16	20	21	29	20
Manchester	28	27	21	21	12	15	16	9	19	18	4	28	27	27	32	20
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	22	17	19	14	28	13	7	11	12	13	15	21	14	18	22	16
North Tyneside	11	12	9	16	25	20	10	16	6	10	8	12	10	15	12	13
Oldham	16	20	22	22	9	16	23	26	22	22	18	22	13	12	17	19
Rochdale	13	11	24	18	10	6	6	20	13	6	13	11	9	5	13	12
Rotherham	27	32	26	25	33	30	33	27	33	32	32	23	36	34	25	30
Salford	18	29	29	26	8	28	24	23	16	25	23	27	29	32	34	25
Sandwell	35	35	33	32	36	32	32	36	36	36	36	32	22	19	24	32
Sefton	12	19	28	35	24	10	20	14	11	11	16	15	15	16	16	17
Sheffield	29	33	27	28	18	11	15	29	28	26	29	20	32	28	26	25
Solihull	15	8	8	23	31	7	22	33	32	20	28	13	7	8	6	17
South Tyneside	30	9	7	5	22	27	34	34	24	33	26	14	25	23	19	22
St. Helens	33	34	35	4	26	26	26	15	25	31	27	25	18	22	18	25
Stockport	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	5	1	1	4	1	2	1	2
Sunderland	36	25	34	34	34	36	36	35	34	34	35	33	34	36	35	34
Tameside	17	24	11	3	11	14	19	22	29	24	21	29	28	24	27	20
Trafford	2	2	5	20	2	3	2	6	9	3	3	2	4	4	3	5
Wakefield	14	15	23	12	13	34	30	31	17	16	24	26	26	29	30	23
Walsall	23	22	15	10	21	2	4	12	20	17	11	17	16	10	15	14
Wigan	24	31	31	30	32	29	28	30	30	35	33	34	33	35	36	31
Wirral	6	7	14	27	19	9	13	4	2	4	6	6	2	6	9	9
Wolverhampton	34	28	25	13	17	12	12	13	7	9	5	7	5	3	5	13

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